

World Breastfeeding Week 2018 rallies support for breastfeeding

The Department of Health, in collaboration with the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative Hong Kong Association (BFHIHKA), the Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF (UNICEF HK) and the Hospital Authority (HA) today (July 26) held an event to celebrate World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) 2018 with a view to raising the community's awareness on breastfeeding and calling for their support.

WBW is celebrated annually in the first week of August in more than 170 countries. The theme for this year is "Breastfeeding: Foundation of Life". Addressing the event, the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, said breastfeeding offers the finest and the most natural nutrition for babies, benefits babies' growth and development and promotes emotional bonding between mothers and babies. Benefits of breastfeeding are also proportional to duration and exclusiveness.

She pointed out that the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that babies should be breastfed exclusively in the first six months. Thereafter, solid foods should be introduced while breastfeeding can continue until the child is 2 years old or beyond.

Professor Chan said that the local breastfeeding rate has been increasing steadily in the past 20 years. The breastfeeding rate on hospital discharge recorded a significant increase from 43 per cent in 1997 to 87 per cent in 2016 while the exclusive breastfeeding rate among 4-month-old babies grew from 6 per cent to 31 per cent in the same period. The result is encouraging, she added.

She emphasised that sustained breastfeeding relies not only on the hard work and perseverance of breastfeeding mothers but their family members and the community as a whole as well.

The Government has all along endeavoured to promote and support breastfeeding. Since the establishment of the Committee on Promotion of Breastfeeding under the Food and Health Bureau in 2014, the Committee has set various strategies. The Department of Health, in collaboration with various sectors, implements the relevant measures, including strengthening support for breastfeeding in healthcare institutions, encouraging adoption of the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Policy, encouraging public places to become Breastfeeding Friendly Premises and to provide baby-care facilities as way to facilitate breastfeeding and lactation for breastfeeding mothers, promulgate and evaluate the effectiveness of the Hong Kong Code of Marketing of Formula Milk and Related Products, and Food Products for Infants & Young Children, and strengthen surveillance on the local breastfeeding situation.

In addition, the Government has been proactively promoting the provision

of baby-care facilities in government premises and public venues. The Government will include a mandatory requirement for the provision of baby-care facilities and lactation rooms in the sale conditions of government land sale sites for new commercial developments comprising office premises and/or retail outlets, eating places and more. The Government will also take corresponding measures to mandate the provision of baby-care facilities and lactation rooms in certain new government premises.

Professor Chan said, "To date, there are already 301 government premises with baby-care facilities and lactation rooms. The Government also proactively encourages public transport facilities to support breastfeeding. Currently, some routes of New World First Ferry, MTR stations and passenger terminals of Hong Kong International Airport have already been providing baby-care facilities. The Government will continue to work with various sectors and organisations to promote and support breastfeeding initiatives on various fronts."

Professor Chan added, "Apart from community support, professional support from healthcare facilities is of particular importance to breastfeeding mothers. Healthcare facilities provide antenatal education and offer comprehensive and timely professional support during their pregnancy, labour, birth and postnatal period, facilitating the effectiveness of breastfeeding. The implementation of Baby Friendly Hospital (BFH) Initiative in healthcare facilities is one of the key measures to support breastfeeding."

Since August 2013, the HA has been implementing the initiative in its eight public hospitals with maternity wards and encouraging them to become BFH in phases. Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Queen Mary Hospital were awarded BFH in May 2016 and January this year respectively. The DH has also launched a pilot scheme of the Baby-Friendly Maternal and Child Health Centre (MCHC) Designation in three MCHCs in June 2016. The MCHCs are Sai Ying Pun MCHC, Kowloon City MCHC and Yaumatei MCHC.

Also attending the event, the Vice-chairperson of the BFHIHKA, Dr Patricia Ip, said, "The BFHIHKA conducts an annual survey of hospitals' practices on the implementation of the WHO's Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding with maternity units in Hong Kong and we have found that an increasing number of nurses are trained to support breastfeeding, while training for doctors could be strengthened. Currently, around 17 per cent of births take place in baby-friendly hospitals in Hong Kong."

The Chairman of the Advocacy and Public Relations Committee of UNICEF HK, Miss Au King-chi, said, "UNICEF HK aims to launch a new 'Breastfeeding Welcome' pledge by the end of the year. Through this, we hope to encourage more restaurants and hotels to join hands with us in creating a welcoming environment for breastfeeding mums. Moreover, UNICEF HK is concerned about baby formula companies' non-compliance with the voluntary Hong Kong Code, especially in deploying misleading marketing practices. We urge the trade to observe the Hong Kong Code and the Government to take positive action for the effective implementation of the Code."

Breastfeeding not only provides the best nutrition for babies and strengthens their immunity, but also protects babies against childhood obesity and diabetes or other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in later life.

To combat the threat of NCDs, the Government this year announced "Towards 2025: Strategy and Action Plan to Prevent and Control Non-communicable Diseases in Hong Kong", setting out nine local targets to be achieved by 2025 which include halting the rise in prevalence of diabetes and obesity. Successful prevention and control of NCDs relies on collaborative efforts by various sectors including the Government, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, academia and each and every member of society. The Government commends all parties for taking measures to protect, promote and support breastfeeding to combat childhood obesity.

More information on breastfeeding is available at the DH's Family Health Service [designated webpage](#). Members of the public can also download the DH's ["Info for Nursing Mum" mobile app](#) to access information on breastfeeding anytime and anywhere.