

World Breastfeeding Week promotes collaboration in support of breastfeeding

To mark World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) 2021, the Department of Health (DH) appeals for cross-sectoral collaboration in promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding. The WBW is celebrated annually in the first week of August in more than 170 countries.

The Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, today (August 3) said, "The theme for WBW this year is 'Protect Breastfeeding: A Shared Responsibility', focusing on enhancing multi-sectoral collaboration and partnership to support breastfeeding families. The theme goes hand in hand with the Government policy that endeavours to promote and support breastfeeding in a multi-pronged approach."

It is everyone's responsibility to protect breastfeeding. The Government has been promoting and supporting the policy through healthcare institutions, healthcare professionals, property developers, employers, family members, community organisations, traders in the formula milk industry, etc. Among others, the Hong Kong Code of Marketing of Formula Milk and Related Products, and Food Products for Infants & Young Children (HK Code), which aims to protect breastfeeding and advocate the proper use of formula milk for infant and young children, has been launched in 2017. It promotes good marketing practices for formula milk and related products as well as food products for infants and children below 36 months old.

Under the HK Code, guidance on the marketing and advertising of formula milk is set to relevant sectors including traders, healthcare workers and healthcare facilities, as well as childcare workers and childcare facilities that are involved in infant and young children's nutrition.

To monitor the trend and implementation of the HK Code, a study was commissioned by the DH in 2019 on the marketing of formula milk for infants and young children. Findings revealed that media advertisements which specifically promote formula milk targeting children under 36 months old decreased significantly to 8.6 per cent, from 45 per cent of the total number of advertisements in a similar study conducted in 2016. Similarly, advertising expenditure on formula milk products for infants and children in Hong Kong dropped from \$3.1 billion in 2015 to \$2.1 billion in 2019, while that targeting children under 36 months old plunged from 93.5 per cent in 2015 to 9.5 per cent in 2019. Yet, cross-promotion (brand extension) was very common. Of the surveyed information materials obtained from the websites of formula milk companies related to breastfeeding and formula feeding, the majority did not contain comprehensive and balanced information as recommended by the HK Code, such as the importance of exclusive and sustained breastfeeding, the negative impacts of introducing bottle feeding, proper instructions on the preparation and use of formula milk, etc.

"We will continue to solicit the support of the trade to comply with the HK Code, and to formulate marketing practices in line with it, which aims to protect breastfeeding and advocate the proper use of formula milk for infants and young children," Professor Chan said.

Separately, the DH has implemented a number of initiatives to promote breastfeeding since the last celebration of WBW 2019. Following the award of Sai Ying Pun, Kowloon City and Yaumatei Maternal and Child Health Centres (MCHCs) under the DH as Baby Friendly MCHCs in August 2019, the DH has also commenced procedures in March this year to pursue the designation of five more MCHCs, so as to support and facilitate breastfeeding.

A mobile app, "Breastfeeding GPS", which contains the latest information of over 430 baby care rooms to help parents locate breastfeeding facilities all over Hong Kong has been launched in September 2020.

At the same time, legislations have been enacted to support and protect breastfeeding during the present term of the Government, including the extension of statutory paternity leave to five days, extension of statutory maternity leave from 10 to 14 weeks, amendments to the Sex Discrimination Ordinance which prohibit discrimination and harassment towards breastfeeding women.

"Active participation by different sectors of the community can build a breastfeeding friendly environment. Despite the interruption of some government services by COVID-19 pandemic over past one and a half years, the Government will continue to encourage further efforts by various parties to further promote, protect and support breastfeeding," Professor Chan said.

More information about WBW 2021 can be found at the designated webpage (www.fhs.gov.hk/wbw2021/index.html).