

SECTION 1.4

COMPLIANCE WITH THE INTERNATIONAL CODE OF MARKETING OF BREAST-MILK SUBSTITUTES

What is the Code?

The Code was adopted in 1981 by the World Health Assembly to promote safe and adequate nutrition for infants, by the protection and promotion of breastfeeding and by ensuring the proper use of breast-milk substitutes, when these are necessary. One of the main principles of the Code is that health care facilities should not be used for the purpose of promoting breast milk substitutes, feeding bottles or teats. Subsequent WHA resolutions have clarified the Code and closed loopholes.

How is the Code relevant to the Baby-friendly Hospital Initiative?

In launching the BFHI in 1991, UNICEF and WHO were hoping to ensure that all maternities would become centres of breastfeeding support. In order to achieve this, hospitals must avoid being used for the promotion of breast milk substitutes, bottles or teats, or the distribution of free formula. The Code, together with the subsequent relevant Resolutions of the World Health Assembly, lays down the basic principles necessary for this. In addition, in adopting the Code in 1981, the World Health Assembly called upon health workers to encourage and protect breastfeeding, and to make themselves familiar with their responsibilities under the Code.

Which products fall under the scope of the Code?

The Code applies to breast milk substitutes, including infant formula; other milk products, foods and beverages, including bottle-fed complementary foods, when marketed or otherwise represented to be suitable, with or without modification, for use as a partial or total replacement of breast milk; feeding bottles and teats.

Since exclusive breastfeeding is to be encouraged for 6 months, any food or drink shown to be suitable for feeding a baby during this period is a breast milk substitute, and thus covered by the Code. This would include baby teas, juices and waters. Special formulas for infants with special medical or nutritional needs also fall under the scope of the Code.

Since continued breastfeeding is to be encouraged for two years or beyond, any milk product shown to be substituting for the breast milk part of the child's diet between six months and two years, such as follow-on formula, is a breast-milk substitute and is thus covered by the Code.

What does the Code say?

The main points in the Code include:

- no advertising of breast-milk substitutes and other products to the public;
- no free samples to mothers;
- no promotion in the health services;
- no donations of free or subsidized supplies of breast-milk substitutes or other products in any part of the health care system;
- no company personnel to contact or advise mothers;
- no gifts or personal samples to health workers;
- no pictures of infants, or other pictures or text idealizing artificial feeding, on the labels of the products;
- information to health workers should only be scientific and factual;