Call for support for appropriate infant and young child feeding

The Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) call on all those who supports victims during emergency situations to avoid distribution of milk powder, infant formula and other milk products (powder/liquid). Distribution of any kind of breast milk substitutes is in violation to the national legislation on “Regulation on protection and strengthening of child feeding by breast milk” issued no 974 on 28th February, 2009.

Infant formulas, other powdered milk products or soya milk products often discourages mothers to continue breast feeding. This exposes infants and young children to increased risk of diseases and death, especially from diarrhea when clean water is scarce. The use of feeding bottles only adds further to the risk of infections as they are difficult to clean properly.

In emergencies, the health and nutrition of infants and young children are particularly threatened. Disease and death rates among these children are higher than for any other age group. The risk of mortality is particularly high because of the combined impact of a greatly increased prevalence of communicable diseases - diarrhea, and the possible increase in rates of malnutrition. Breastfeeding provides critical protection from infection in emergency environments. In accordance with international guidance, donations and procurement of infant formula, or any other milk products(powdered or liquid) milk, including soya milk liquid/powder, and bottles and teats should not be made to either health facilities or the community. Distribution of it is critical to encourage and support mothers to initiate breastfeeding immediately after delivering their child and to continue exclusively breastfeeding the infant up to six months of age. Basic interventions to facilitate breastfeeding include prioritizing mothers with young children for shelter, food, security, and water and sanitation, enabling mother-to-mother peer support, providing specific space for skilled breastfeeding counseling, and support to maintain or re-establish lactation. A mother is able to produce breast-milk under all circumstances; what is important is that she does not interrupt her breastfeeding.

MOPH, UNICEF, WHO, WFP and FAO and all nutrition cluster members strongly urge all who are involved in funding, planning and implementing this emergency response in Afghanistan to avoid the unnecessary disease and endangers lives-illness infants and young children associated with artificial feeding; by promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding and by preventing the uncontrolled distribution and use of any form of milk, powder or liquid. All queries and any information about donations should be directed to the Public Nutrition Department of the Ministry of Public Health.

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