

Current Health Event

Breastfeeding

Evidence points to the importance of breastfeeding both to the baby and the mother; breastfeeding is the best nourishment for optimal infant growth and development. Despite that, globally, only around 40% of infants aged less than 6 months were exclusively breastfed over the period of 2007-2014.

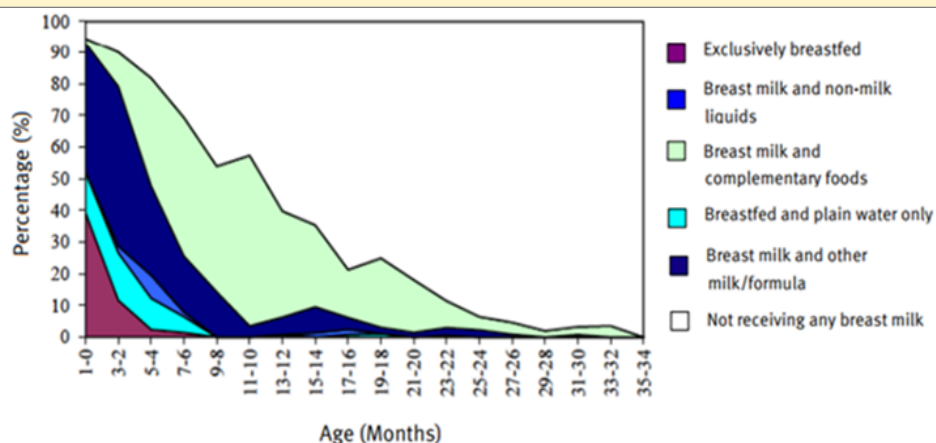
Editorial note:

Breastfeeding practices in Lebanon are not any better, with most recent figures indicating that only 14.8% of infants under 6 months of age are exclusively breastfed (MICS, 2009). Despite the high rates of early initiation of breastfeeding (>90%), rates of continued breastfeeding were 37.5% and 14.6% of infants aged 12 to 15 months and 20 to 23 months, respectively. In addition, other liquids or foods are introduced early on in life and 40% of infants are given formula milk in addition to breastmilk during the first month of life.

Many factors affect the mother's decision to breastfeed and the duration of breastfeeding; namely, personal factors (such as knowledge and perceptions on the quantity and quality of milk), social and cultural aspects (such as area of residence, socio-economic status), health care professionals, availability and free distribution of formula milk, support at home and in the workplace, amongst others.

The Ministry of Public Health has been keen on improving infant and young child feeding practices in Lebanon. The Government has enacted a law (47/2008) to adopt all provisions of the International Code for Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes (which is a code issued by WHO to regulate the marketing of breast milk substitutes). In addition, the MOPH conducts yearly

Figure 1: Infant & young child feeding practices in Lebanon: percentage of children under 3 years by feeding type and age, based on the Multi-Cluster Indicator Survey (CAS & UNICEF, 2009)



awareness campaigns in collaboration with all partners. The month of February 2018 marks the National Breastfeeding Month in Lebanon. The national campaign aims at raising awareness of the general public on the importance of breastfeeding through a promotional TV clip, educational posters and flyers, and social media, as well as linking the mothers with free lactation consultancy services through the MOPH 1214 hotline.

The MOPH is also launching a policy on infant and young child feeding practices, in line with WHO and UNICEF recommendations: initiation of breastfeeding within 1 hour of birth, exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months of age (infant only receives breast milk without any additional food or drink, not even water) and continued breastfeeding along with appropriate complementary feeding (solid foods) up to two years of age or beyond.

Work is also ongoing with hospitals to implement the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI), which is a global initiative launched by WHO and UNICEF to implement practices that protect, promote and support breastfeeding. Currently 16 hospitals in Lebanon are in the process of implementing this initiative.

WHO response

In addition to BFHI and the International Code for Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes, WHO is supporting countries to improve infant and young child feeding practices through:

- **Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding** which aims to protect, promote and support appropriate infant and young child feeding practices;
- **Comprehensive Implementation Plan on Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition** one of its targets is to increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months of life up to at least 50% by 2025;
- **WHO Global Data Bank on Infant and Young Child Feeding** for global monitoring and surveillance.

Notifiable Diseases in Lebanon [cumulative n° of cases among all Residents] as of 22 February 2018				
Disease	2017	2018	Jan.	Feb.
Vaccine Preventable Diseases				
Polio	0	0	0	0
AFP	77	9	9	2
Measles	126	38	25	13
Mumps	235	5	4	1
Pertussis	92	2	1	1
Rabies	1	1	1	0
Rubella	10	2	2	0
Tetanus	0	0	0	0
Viral Hep. B	321	19	16	3
Water/Food Borne Diseases				
Brucellosis	460	17	12	5
Cholera	0	0	0	0
Hydatid cyst	18	1	1	0
Typhoid fever	656	40	30	6
Viral Hep. A	776	89	72	17
Other Diseases				
Leishmaniasis	140	0	0	0
Meningitis	366	49	40	9
Viral Hep. C	130	10	6	4