

Guiding principles for feeding infants and young children during emergencies



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Breastfeeding

Principle 1

Infants born into populations affected by emergencies should normally be exclusively breastfed from birth to 6 months of age.

- 1.1 Every effort should be made to identify alternative ways to breastfeed infants whose biological mothers are unavailable.

Principle 2

The aim should be to create and sustain an environment that encourages frequent breastfeeding for children up to two years or beyond.

Breast-milk substitutes

Principle 3

The quantity, distribution and use of breast-milk substitutes at emergency sites should be strictly controlled.

- 3.1 A nutritionally adequate breast-milk substitute should be available, and fed by cup, only to those infants who have to be fed on breast-milk substitutes.
- 3.2 Those responsible for feeding a breast-milk substitute should be adequately informed and equipped to ensure its safe preparation and use.
- 3.3 Feeding a breast-milk substitute to a minority of children should not interfere with protecting and promoting breastfeeding for the majority.
- 3.4 The use of infant-feeding bottles and artificial teats during emergencies should be actively discouraged.

Complementary feeding

Principle 4

To sustain growth, development and health, infants from 6 months onwards and older children need hygienically prepared, and easy-to-eat and digest, foods that nutritionally complement breast milk.

Principle 5

Caregivers need secure uninterrupted access to appropriate ingredients with which to prepare and feed nutrient-dense foods to older infants and young children.

- 5.1 Adequate feeding of infants and young children cannot be assured if the food and other basic needs of households are unmet.
- 5.2 Blended foods provided as food aid, especially if they are fortified with essential nutrients, can be useful for feeding older infants and young children. However, their provision should not interfere with promoting the use of local ingredients and other donated commodities for preparing suitable complementary foods.
- 5.3 Complementary foods should be prepared and fed frequently, consistent with principles of good hygiene and proper food handling.

Caring for caregivers

Principle 6

Because the number of caregivers is often reduced during emergencies as stress levels increase, promoting caregivers' coping capacity is an essential part of fostering good feeding practices for infants and young children.

Protecting children

Principle 7

The health and vigour of infants and children should be protected so they are able to suckle frequently and well and maintain their appetite for complementary foods.

Malnutrition

Principle 8

Nutritional status should be continually monitored to identify malnourished children so that their condition can be assessed and treated, and

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