

INTERNATIONAL THE NEWS

PROTECTION OF BREASTFEEDING ORDINANCE 2002 Tuesday, February 09, 2010

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Heaving a sigh of relief to see its eight-year-long hard slog bearing fruit, the Nutrition Wing has finally secured the consent of its parent department - Health Ministry - to the rules framed for the speedy enforcement of the Protection of Breastfeeding & Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002.

Under the rules, which have formally come into effect following their notification of late repealing the National Infant Feeding Board Rules 2004, baby food producers have been barred from using expressions like 'materialised, humanised or equivalent' on milk formula containers, and drawing any comparison between their products and the mother's milk.

A ban has also been slapped on the display of formula milk promotional photographs, drawings or graphics on containers. Nonetheless, drawings can be used to illustrate the correct method of preparation of formula milk and that too, only if the bottle is not shown in them.

The rules have bound the formula milk producers to pick only those labels for their products, which encourage breastfeeding instead of discouraging it, and ensure the appearance of a 'clear and easily understood printed message in Urdu and English' on their product containers that mother's milk is the best food for the baby and helps in preventing diarrhoea and other illnesses.

Likewise, every container of infant formula will carry statements that 'the product must be used only on the advice of a health worker as to the need for its use and the proper method of use' and 'feeding with a cup and spoon is safer than bottle-feeding'.

Also, it has been made mandatory for baby food producers to display on their products the quantity required to properly feed the infants in proportion to their weight and the age in months, which except for infant formulas will in no case be less than six months, after which the designated product may be used, and a warning about the health hazards of inappropriate preparation, including the potential hazards associated with using a feeding bottle, especially when it is improperly sterilised.

Under the rules, labels of sweetened condensed milk must carry a warning that it will not be used for infant feeding.

The ministry has slapped a ban on the distribution of materials, implying or creating the belief that bottle-feeding is equivalent to or superior to breastfeeding. The rules say that all information and educational materials, whether written, audio or visual, must enlighten people, especially mothers, on the benefits and superiority of breastfeeding, preparation for and maintenance of breastfeeding including maternal nutrition, negative effect on breastfeeding of introducing partial bottle-feeding, and difficulty of reversing the decision not to breastfeed, even if bottle-feed is limited to a few bottles.

Also, such materials must plainly shed light on the health hazards of giving infants the complementary

foods within six months of birth. “They must explain that complementary foods can be easily prepared at home and that it must be given to infants above the age of six months with a cup and spoon and not in a feeding bottle.”

Some of the rules are for health workers, engaged in maternal and child health, who along with family members have been stopped from accepting gifts or financial contribution or benefit from infant formula manufacturers or distributors.

Also from now onwards, health workers won't be allowed to accept from or give samples of designated products to any person, or demonstrate the use of infant formula, except to individual mothers or members of their families in special cases of need. And in such cases, hazards of the use of infant formula will be clearly explained to the mothers and their family members.

The rules also promise the formation of a National Infant Feeding Board, headed by the health minister, while the deputy director general health (nutrition) will act as the board's secretary.

On the reported violations of the Ordinance or the rules governing it by formula milk manufacturers, distributors or health workers, the board will order an investigation, followed by prosecution by the court of law in case the investigation reveals an offence.

Giving advice to the federal government on communication and public education programmes for the promotion of breastfeeding, the development of informative and educational material on infant and child feeding, and capacity building of health workers on lactation management is also duty of the board.

Likewise, the board is to make recommendations to the federal and provincial governments in respect of laws, rules or regulations directly or indirectly affecting breastfeeding and nutrition for infants and young children.

Requests for the donations of baby products to the government's healthcare facilities will be forwarded to the board by the federal government for consideration and recommendations. The board will meet at least once in every four months in Islamabad unless the chairperson decides to hold the meeting elsewhere.

Under the rules, the board's decision will be expressed in terms of the opinion of the majority of members, present and voting at a meeting. And in case of equality of votes, the chairperson or other person presiding over the meeting will have a casting vote.

For the enforcement of the ordinance and rules governing it, inspectors are to be appointed across the country. They could report the ordinance and rule violations to the board's secretary for initiation of prosecution against the people concerned. Surveillance of the marketed baby food for ensuring quality control is also duty of the inspectors.

When contacted, Dr Baseer Khan, Deputy Director General Nutrition Wing, confirmed the notification of the rules for the Protection of Breastfeeding & Child Nutrition Ordinance 2002. He said belatedly though, issuance of the rules is a welcome step, which would promote and protect breastfeeding, and regulate the marketing and promotion of formula milk.