

Infant and young-child nutrition

The Fifty-eighth World Health Assembly,

Recalling the adoption by the Health Assembly of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes (resolution WHA34.22), resolutions WHA39.28, WHA41.11, WHA46.7, WHA47.5, WHA49.15, WHA54.2 on infant and young child nutrition, appropriate feeding practices and related questions, and particularly WHA55.25, which endorses the global strategy for infant and young child feeding;

Having considered the report on infant and young-child nutrition;

Aware that the joint FAO/WHO expert meeting on *Enterobacter sakazakii* and other microorganisms in powdered infant formula held in 2004 concluded that intrinsic contamination of powdered infant formula with *E. sakazakii* and *Salmonella* had been a cause of infection and illness, including severe disease in infants, particularly preterm, low birth-weight or immunocompromised infants, and could lead to serious developmental sequelae and death;¹

Noting that such severe outcomes are especially serious in preterm, low birth-weight and immunocompromised infants, and therefore are of concern to all Member States;

Bearing in mind that the Codex Alimentarius Commission is revising its recommendations on hygienic practices for the manufacture of foods for infants and young children;

Recognizing the need for parents and caregivers to be fully informed of evidence-based public-health risks of intrinsic contamination of powdered infant formula and the potential for introduced contamination, and the need for safe preparation, handling and storage of prepared infant formula;

Concerned that nutrition and health claims may be used to promote breast-milk substitutes as superior to breastfeeding;

Acknowledging that the Codex Alimentarius Commission plays a pivotal role in providing guidance to Member States on the proper regulation of foods, including foods for infants and young children;

¹ FAO/WHO Expert Meeting on *E. sakazakii* and other Microorganisms in Powdered Infant Formula: Meeting Report. Microbiological Risk Assessment Series No. 6, 2004, p. 37.

Bearing in mind that on several occasions the Health Assembly has called upon the Commission to give full consideration, within the framework of its operational mandate, to evidence-based action that it might take to improve the health standards of foods, consistent with the aims and objectives of relevant public health strategies, particularly WHO's global strategy for infant and young-child feeding (resolution WHA55.25) and Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (resolution WHA57.17);

Recognizing that such action requires a clear understanding of the respective roles of the Health Assembly and the Codex Alimentarius Commission, and that of food regulation in the broader context of public health policies;

Taking into account resolution WHA56.23 on the joint FAO/WHO evaluation of the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, which endorsed WHO's increased direct involvement in the Commission and requested the Director-General to strengthen WHO's role in complementing the work of the Commission with other relevant WHO activities in the areas of food safety and nutrition, with special attention to issues mandated in Health Assembly resolutions,

1. URGES Member States:

(1) to continue to protect, promote and support exclusive breastfeeding for six months as a global public health recommendation, taking into account the findings of the WHO Expert Consultation on optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding,¹ and to provide for continued breastfeeding up to two years of age or beyond, by implementing fully the WHO global strategy on infant and young-child feeding that encourages the formulation of a comprehensive national policy, including where appropriate a legal framework to promote maternity leave and a supportive environment for six months' exclusive breastfeeding, a detailed plan of action to implement, monitor and evaluate the policy, and allocation of adequate resources for this process;

(2) to ensure that nutrition and health claims are not permitted for breast-milk substitutes, except where specifically provided for in national legislation;²

(3) to ensure that clinicians and other health-care personnel, community health workers and families, parents and other caregivers, particularly of infants at high risk, are provided with enough information and training by health-care providers, in a timely manner on the preparation, use and handling of powdered infant formula in order to minimize health hazards; are informed that powdered infant formula may contain pathogenic microorganisms and must be prepared and used appropriately; and, where applicable, that this information is conveyed through an explicit warning on packaging;

(4) to ensure that financial support and other incentives for programmes and health professionals working in infant and young-child health do not create conflicts of interest;

(5) to ensure that research on infant and young-child feeding, which may form the basis for public policies, always contains a declaration relating to conflicts of interest and is subject to independent peer review;

¹ As formulated in the conclusions and recommendations of the Expert Consultation (Geneva, 28-30 March 2001) that completed the systematic review of the optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding (see document A54/INF.DOC./4).

² The reference to national legislation also applies to regional economic integration organizations.

- (6) to work closely with relevant entities, including manufacturers, to continue to reduce the concentration and prevalence of pathogens, including *Enterobacter sakazakii*, in powdered infant formula;
- (7) to continue to ensure that manufacturers adhere to Codex Alimentarius or national food standards and regulations;
- (8) to ensure policy coherence at national level by stimulating collaboration between health authorities, food regulators and food standard-setting bodies;
- (9) to participate actively and constructively in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission;
- (10) to ensure that all national agencies involved in defining national positions on public health issues for use in all relevant international forums, including the Codex Alimentarius Commission, have a common and consistent understanding of health policies adopted by the Health Assembly, and to promote these policies;

2. REQUESTS the Codex Alimentarius Commission:

- (1) to continue to give full consideration, when elaborating standards, guidelines and recommendations, to those resolutions of the Health Assembly that are relevant in the framework of its operational mandate;
- (2) to establish standards, guidelines and recommendations on foods for infants and young children formulated in a manner that ensures the development of safe and appropriately labelled products that meet their known nutritional and safety needs, thus reflecting WHO policy, in particular the WHO global strategy for infant and young child feeding and the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and other relevant resolutions of the Health Assembly;
- (3) urgently to complete work currently under way on addressing the risk of microbiological contamination of powdered infant formula and establish appropriate microbiological criteria or standards related to *E. sakazakii* and other relevant microorganisms in powdered infant formula; and to provide guidance on safe handling and on warning messages on product packaging;

3. REQUESTS the Director-General:

- (1) in collaboration with FAO, and taking into account the work undertaken by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, to develop guidelines for clinicians and other health-care providers, community health workers and family, parents and other caregivers on the preparation, use, handling and storage of infant formula so as to minimize risk, and to address the particular needs of Member States in establishing effective measures to minimize risk in situations where infants cannot be, or are not, fed breast milk;
- (2) to take the lead in supporting independently reviewed research, including by collecting evidence from different parts of the world, in order to get a better understanding of the ecology, taxonomy, virulence and other characteristics of *E. sakazakii*, in line with the recommendations of the FAO/WHO Expert Meeting on *E. sakazakii* and other Microorganisms in Powdered Infant Formula, and to explore means of reducing its level in reconstituted powdered infant formula;

(3) to provide information in order to promote and facilitate the contribution of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, within the framework of its operational mandate, to full implementation of international public health policies;

(4) to report to the Health Assembly each even year, along with the report on the status of implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and the relevant resolutions of the Health Assembly, on progress in the consideration of matters referred to the Codex Alimentarius Commission for its action.

Ninth plenary meeting, 25 May 2005
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