

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ILCA ENCOURAGES BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT IN HAITI

In the aftermath of the powerful earthquake disaster in Haiti, the International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA) urges health care providers and rescue workers to include breastfeeding support as a vital part of disaster relief and humanitarian aid efforts. ILCA also **discourages** donations of infant formula since artificial feeding can increase illness and disease in an emergency.

According to Angela Smith, President of ILCA's 5,000-member international organization of International Board Certified Lactation Consultants, "Breastfeeding provides a sanitary, safe, and consistently available food source, which is vitally important during and following a disaster. Human milk also contains important anti-infective properties that protect infants from malnutrition, diarrhea and other diseases that commonly arise during an emergency situation such as this tragic situation in Haiti."

According to the Emergency Nutrition Network, artificial baby milks were distributed to 72% of families with infants following the December 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean.

This predominantly breastfeeding region of the world experienced a dramatic decline in breastfeeding rates as a result and, according to Smith, the well-meaning donations of formula were linked to a tripling of the rate of diarrheal disease. More than 70% of infants experiencing diarrhea had been fed from the free provisions infant formula.

Smith added that with breastfeeding, perfect nutrition for infants is always available no matter what the environment is like. Mothers affected by a disaster can continue to make milk, even if they are stressed or malnourished. In fact, Smith says, breastfeeding *lowers* stress levels in both infants and mothers. “We urge health care providers and families across the world to promote, protect, and support breastfeeding during this and other times of emergency,” says Smith. “New mothers need accurate information and support to continue providing their infants with the best protection of all: mother’s milk.”

ILCA provides several recommendations, including:

- Encourage mothers to continue breastfeeding to give infants sanitary, safe nutrition, to help fight infection and disease, and to keep infants warm;
- *Feed the mother* so she can, in turn, feed her infant;
- Provide a safe environment for breastfeeding or expressing milk, including providing a private area or a way to breastfeed discreetly, if the mother desires it;
- Assist mothers who are separated from their infants with regular milk removal to maintain their milk production and avoid engorgement;
- Provide donor human milk from a human milk bank if a mother is injured or unable to directly breastfeed;

- Assist mothers with re-establishing their milk production if they have already weaned their baby.

These recommendations are consistent with directives from organizations such as UNICEF and the World Health Organization’s document, “Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding,” as well as the “Infant Feeding in Emergencies” guidance from the Infant Feeding in Emergencies Core Group, which includes UNICEF and the Emergency Nutrition Network.

ILCA also encourages the general public to avoid donating infant formula and, instead, to donate funds to relief organizations for use in meeting highest priority needs.

ILCA has several free downloadable resources for families, health care providers, and relief workers at: www.ilca.org. The website also has a user-friendly “Find a Lactation Consultant Directory” of available International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) worldwide who can assist new mothers or relief workers with lactation.

To learn more about breastfeeding in emergency situations, visit the ILCA website at www.ilca.org, or contact the ILCA Office at info@ilca.org, or (919) 861-5577.

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