

MEDIA STATEMENT

To: Editors and Health Journalists

Issued by: Department of Health

Date: Thursday, 31 July 2025

World Breastfeeding Week Commemoration: 1-7 August

Pretoria: The Department of Health in collaboration with various stakeholders will in August join the global community to mark World Breastfeeding Week to intensify awareness about the long-term health benefits of exclusive breastfeeding for both the mother and child, as part of ongoing efforts to increase the rates of breastfeeding in the country.

World Breastfeeding Week is a global movement aimed at promoting breastfeeding and creating a conducive environment that supports mothers to breastfeed their babies, ultimately contributing to their well-being. Exclusive breastfeeding provides several benefits including optimal nutrition for the baby's first six months of life, protection against infections and illnesses, and reduced risks of various conditions including obesity, asthma and type 1 diabetes. Lack of exclusive breastfeeding contributes to susceptibility to common infections, developmental issues and chronic diseases.

While global exclusive breastfeeding rates have seen a slight increase in the previous years, South Africa is still lagging behind with a concerning decline in exclusive breastfeeding rates from 32% in 2016 to 22% in 2024. The current trend means the country is unlikely to achieve the World Health Assembly breastfeeding target of at least 50% by the end of the year 2025, and 70% in 2030.

This decline can be attributed to a number of factors including rising normalisation of formula feeding which is often driven by aggressive marketing practices by the infant formula industry, especially on digital platforms. Simultaneously, the country faces an escalating malnutrition crisis, particularly among children under the age of 5 years, marked by worrying increases in stunting, wasting and overweight prevalence.

Exclusive breastfeeding is a shared responsibility, extending beyond just the role of mothers, with families, communities, healthcare systems, and employers, having important roles to play. Breastfeeding is not just about reaching country and global targets, but also about supporting infant health and development, as well as maternal well-being.

It is against this background that the Department, working with the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the South African Breastmilk Reserve (SABR) and other partners will kick-off 2025 World Breastfeeding Week awareness activities by engaging individuals and organisations to enhance

collaboration and support for breastfeeding as part of ongoing efforts to galvanise actions to strengthen breastfeeding support systems to create a conducive environment for mother to breastfeed their babies. This is part of a series of activities to raise awareness about this annual campaign.

The interventions are in line with 2025 World Breastfeeding Week theme: "**Prioritize Breastfeeding: Create Sustainable Support Systems**", which emphasizes the importance of establishing long-term, equitable support structures for breastfeeding mothers. It also highlights the connection between breastfeeding and environmental sustainability, recognizing breastfeeding as a key factor in climate resilience.

Details of Breastfeeding Market Outreach event are as follows:

Date: Friday, 01 August 2025
Venue: Loftus Park Shopping Centre, Kirkness Street, Pretoria
Time: 9h00 -15h00

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