



Breast milk substitutes: trade exhibitions and education activities

POLICY

Background

In 1981 the World Health Organization (WHO) introduced the *Code for Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes*.¹ The aim of this Code is to contribute to the provision of safe and adequate nutrition for infants, by the protection and promotion of breast-feeding, and by ensuring the proper use of breast milk substitutes, when these are necessary, on the basis of adequate information and through appropriate marketing and distribution. Of particular note are points raised in the introduction to the Code, as below.

Considering that, when mothers do not breast-feed, or only do so partially, there is a legitimate market for infant formula and for suitable ingredients from which to prepare it; that all these products should accordingly be made accessible to those who need them through commercial or non-commercial distribution systems; and that they should not be marketed or distributed in ways that may interfere with the protection and promotion of breast-feeding (Page 6).

Considering that manufacturers and distributors of breast-milk substitutes have an important and constructive role to play in relation to infant feeding, and in the promotion of the aim of this Code and its proper implementation (page 7).

In addition the code gives clear direction regarding formula manufacturers and health professionals.

*Article 7.2 Information provided by manufacturers and distributors to health professionals regarding products within the scope of this Code should **be restricted to scientific and factual matters**, and such information should not imply or create a belief that bottle feeding is equivalent or superior to breast-feeding.*

An update to the Code in the form of a FAQ document was issued in 2017.²

Australia's response to the WHO Code is the Marketing in Australia of Infant Formulas (MAIF) Agreement, issued in 1992 and last updated in 2016 following public consultation.³ It applies only to breast milk substitutes for infants up to 12 months. The MAIF Agreement is a voluntary, self-regulatory, code of conduct between the manufacturers and importers of infant formula in Australia. Complaints may be lodged with the MAIF Tribunal.

Of relevance to neonatal nurses who are also International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs), the Code of Professional Conduct for IBCLCs states that IBCLCs should "Supply sufficient and accurate information to enable clients to make informed decisions".⁴ Further, they should "Convey accurate, complete and objective information about commercial products. Present information without personal bias". The International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (IBLCE) issued a policy regarding possible commercial influence on educational events by companies marketing breast milk substitutes (including bottles and teats).⁵

Policy statements

ACNN supports the use of breast milk as the preferred food for infants until 12 months of age.³

ACNN supports the IBCLCE Code of Professional Conduct for IBCLCs for neonatal nurses who are also IBCLCs.⁴

ACNN supports the standards developed by the IBLCE in relation to companies marketing breast milk substitutes.⁵

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Trade exhibition by manufacturers and distributors of breastmilk substitutes, including infant formula, feeding bottles and teats, will be accepted by ACNN only from companies that comply with the WHO *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes*¹ and the Australian MAIF Agreement.³ ACNN undertakes to ensure compliance with the Code and Agreement in regard to venue, exposure to the public, and promotional materials.

In addition to trade exhibition, other forms of financial support for education events from manufacturers and distributors of breast milk substitutes, including infant formula, feeding bottles and teats, will be accepted only as an unrestricted education grant.⁵

References

1. World Health Organization (1981). International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes. <https://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/infantfeeding/9241541601/en/> Accessed January 2019.
2. World Health Organization (2017). International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes. Frequently Asked Questions. <https://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/infantfeeding/breastmilk-substitutes-FAQ2017/en/> Accessed January 2019.
3. Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. Marketing in Australia of Infant Formulas 1992, updated July 2016. <https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/public-registers/documents/D15%2B143530.pdf>
4. International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (2015). Code of Professional Conduct of IBCLCs. Effective November 1, 2011; Updated September 2015. <https://iblce.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/code-of-professional-conduct.pdf> Accessed February 2019.
5. International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners (2017). Minimising Commercial Influence on Education Policy. <https://iblce.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/minimising-commercial-influence-on-education-policy.pdf> Accessed February 2019.