

World Breastfeeding Week 2019 calls for community support for breastfeeding

The Department of Health (DH), in collaboration with the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative Hong Kong Association, the Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF (UNICEF HK) and the Hospital Authority (HA) today (July 27) held an event to celebrate World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) 2019, aiming to protect, promote and support breastfeeding through enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration.

WBW is celebrated annually in the first week of August in more than 170 countries. The theme for this year is "Empower Parents: Enable Breastfeeding". Addressing the event, the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, said breastfeeding brings immediate and long-term benefits to both mothers and babies. Such benefits are proportional to duration and exclusiveness. Sustained breastfeeding relies not only on the hard work and perseverance of breastfeeding mothers but also support from their family members and the community as a whole.

Professor Chan said, "In 2014, the Food and Health Bureau set up the Committee on Promotion of Breastfeeding, which provides specific recommendations on strategies and action plans to strengthen the protection, promotion and support for breastfeeding. Its objective is to enhance the sustainability of breastfeeding and promote breastfeeding as a norm for baby care widely accepted by the general public. The Government has already implemented initiatives in accordance with recommendations by the Committee on various fronts."

Professor Chan continued, "Breastfeeding outcomes improve significantly when there is adequate and timely professional support from healthcare facilities on antenatal education and in delivery and early postnatal periods."

She pointed out that the HA and the DH have been implementing the Baby Friendly Hospital (BFH) Initiative and the pilot scheme of the Baby-Friendly Maternal and Child Health Centre (MCHC) Designation respectively over the past few years. Two HA hospitals have already been accredited as BFHs. As for private hospitals, she said she was glad to see that Gleneagles Hong Kong Hospital joined the BFH Initiative last year. Meanwhile, three MCHCs are working through the final level of accreditation under the pilot scheme. She is looking forward to more participation from other healthcare facilities.

In addition, the Government has all along endeavoured to build up a breastfeeding-friendly environment in workplaces, public venues and the community. The Government encourages the implementation of the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace (BFW) policy at workplaces to enable lactating staff to continue breastfeeding after returning to work. Currently, over 75 government

bureaux and departments have implemented the BFW policy to provide an inclusive environment for lactating staff to express breast milk in the workplace to continue breastfeeding their babies.

The Government has been proactively promoting the provision of baby care facilities in government premises and public venues. The Government last December imposed a mandatory requirement for the provision of baby care facilities and lactation rooms in the sale conditions of government land sale sites for new commercial developments. Such facilities must also be provided in certain new government premises. To date, more than 320 baby care rooms have been set up in the premises of government departments and organisations.

In the wider community, the Government has collaborated with UNICEF HK for many years in promoting the Breastfeeding Friendly Premises initiative. To date, more than 130 venues, including restaurants, shopping malls, public transport facilities and theme parks, have shown support and provided a breastfeeding-friendly environment. The Government will continue to work with various sectors and organisations to put forward more breastfeeding-friendly initiatives.

Professor Chan said, "Through the concerted efforts of different parties, the local breastfeeding rate has been increasing steadily in the past 20 years. The breastfeeding rate on hospital discharge recorded a significant increase from 51 per cent in 1998 to 88 per cent in 2018 while the exclusive breastfeeding rate among 4-month-old babies grew from 6 per cent to 29 per cent in the same period."

She pointed out that understanding and acknowledgement from youngsters towards breastfeeding is of paramount importance in the continuous promotion and support of breastfeeding. The DH this year held the "Supporting Mothers' Breastfeeding Journey" Secondary School Short Video Competition, in which students were encouraged to create video clips on breastfeeding to deepen their understanding of the importance of sustained breastfeeding. The competition received a strong response with over 280 students' participation.

She praised the high standard of the entries, which displayed creativity and were impactful. She gave her heartiest congratulations to the awardees and expressed her hope that they will continue to support breastfeeding and help the new generation grow in a healthier way.

Breastfeeding offers the finest and most natural nutrition for babies, benefits babies' growth and development and promotes emotional bonding between mothers and babies. The World Health Organization recommends that babies should be breastfed exclusively in the first six months. Thereafter, solid foods should be introduced to fulfil babies nutritional requirements while breastfeeding can continue until the child is 2 years old or beyond.

More information on breastfeeding is available at the DH's Family Health Service [designated webpage](#).