



Save the Children
Australia

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Contact Sharyn Hanly: +61 3 9938 2011 or Mob: 0418 560 810

Save the Children exposes companies violating the baby milk code

A generation on from one of the biggest public boycotts in corporate history, almost 1.4 million children are still dying every year because they are not getting enough of their mother's milk. Save the Children has found that despite a UN approved code to regulate the marketing of baby milk and food, manufacturers continue to make a mockery of the rules and are still promoting their products unethically without sanction - a major part of the problem.

Globally, improving breastfeeding rates could save the lives of almost 3,800 children a day. In Bangladesh alone it could cut infant mortality by one third saving the lives of 314 children every day from killer diseases such as diarrhoea and pneumonia.

The findings are revealed as Save the Children calls on the public to challenge all companies who manufacture breast milk substitutes, and put children before profits. It has been 25 years since a UN approved code to restrict the promotion of substitute baby milk and food was introduced, but with no proper monitoring or more stringent laws, the violations will continue.

Official Government campaigns promoting breastfeeding continue to lag well behind marketing campaigns for manufactured baby food. This disparity is even more pronounced in developing countries, where most deaths occur. For example, in Bangladesh, the total value of baby milk and food imports is almost AUS\$37 million per year - 100 times more than the government of Bangladesh can afford to invest in supporting breastfeeding promotion.

Margaret Douglas, Save the Children Australia CEO said: "It's incomprehensible why - when we know that breastfeeding can make the single biggest contribution to a baby's survival - that companies, for over 25 years, have been allowed to flout a UN approved code with little fear of retribution."

Save the Children's research into violations of the code revealed:

- All companies still openly market certain baby foods and drink (e.g. flavoured baby water and juices) to babies from four months - contravening WHO guidance, which recommends exclusive breastfeeding until six months
- Supermarkets and pharmacies violate the code by undercutting each other's prices through promotions and low pricing. These account for almost three quarters of all sales of baby milk substitutes.
- Telephone support lines and increasingly websites are all used to reach mothers - a type of indirect promotion banned by the code.

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However, Save the Children has encouraged baby food companies to change their policies. One of these, Gerber, recently became the first company to meet the FTSE4Good index, proving to other companies that it can be done, but has since been taken over by Nestle, leaving the FTSE4Good index with no manufacturers on its lists yet again.

Douglas continued: "We must engage with baby milk manufacturers to convince them to put children before profits. Children cannot wait another generation until this is fixed. All food companies, governments, the WHO and UNICEF must put their full weight behind the code."

Save the Children is calling for:

- All manufacturers to stop violating the code
- Government to go further in tightening the legislation on the promotion of breast milk substitutes and to increase funding for the promotion of breastfeeding
- The WHO to be bolder in ensuring companies are held to account and regularly monitored for code compliance
- UNICEF to ensure that compliance with the Code becomes a measure of progress on countries' implementation of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

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Save the Children Australia is part of the International Save the Children Alliance, made up of 27 member countries. Working in over 100 countries, Save the Children is the world's largest independent child rights development organisation.