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Tell Hospitals to Stop Infant Formula Marketing!

A 2011 study shows that the vast majority (72%) of U.S. hospitals continue to distribute industry-sponsored samples of infant formula to new mothers.¹ Formula makers – mostly big pharmaceutical companies – use this insidious marketing tactic to encourage mothers to feed their babies formula instead of breastfeeding. Mothers who receive formula samples are less likely to breastfeed exclusively and breastfeed for shorter periods of time. Yet, healthcare providers agree that breastfeeding for the first six months of life offers crucial long-term benefits for children. ***It's time to end this dangerous practice and protect children's health.***

Infant formula giveaways are bad for babies

- **Breastfeeding is best for babies.** All major medical organizations recommend exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months, followed by continued breastfeeding for the first year and beyond, with the gradual introduction of appropriate complementary foods to the infant's diet beginning around six months of age.² Despite these recommendations, in the U.S. only 14.8 percent of babies are exclusively breastfed for six months.³
- **Distributing infant formula samples to new mothers leads to a decrease in breastfeeding.** Studies have shown that women who receive commercial discharge bags containing infant formula are more likely to stop breastfeeding sooner than those who don't receive these samples. The link between formula samples and reduced breastfeeding is well-documented.⁴
- **Higher rates of breastfeeding exist in states that have better records of banning formula samples from hospitals.** In states with the most hospitals that have banned distribution of formula samples, the average breastfeeding initiation rate was higher than those states with the worst records.⁵
- **Recognizing the dangers of formula marketing, the WHO established the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes in 1981.** The Code states that manufacturers of infant formula should not provide samples of products to pregnant women and mothers. Healthcare facilities are not to be used for the marketing of infant formula brands.⁶ ***Most hospitals in the United States are in violation of the WHO Code.***

Breastfeeding saves lives and dollars

- **Health benefits for children:** Children that are not breastfed have an increased risk of acute otitis media, non-specific gastroenteritis, severe lower respiratory tract infections, atopic dermatitis, asthma, obesity, type 1 and 2 diabetes, childhood leukemia, syndrome (SIDS), and necrotizing enterocolitis. One study found that breastfed children are 22 percent less likely than those who are not to be obese.⁷

- **Health benefits for mothers:** Mothers who do not breastfeed experience increased morbidity and mortality over those who do, including reduced risk of type 2 diabetes, breast cancer, obesity, ovarian cancer, post-partum depression, and bladder infections.⁸
- **Benefits to the U.S. economy:** The cost savings to the U.S. economy if more parents were to breastfeed their babies would be significant. One study found that if 90 percent of families in the United States breastfed babies exclusively for six months, savings could amount to \$13 billion. If 80 percent of families met the six month exclusive breastfeeding goal, \$10.5 billion could be saved.⁹
- **Economic benefits for families:** Formula feeding costs between \$800 and \$2800 per year.¹⁰ Breastfeeding saves families the cost of formula, as well as potential healthcare fees for infants that do not reap the health benefits of breast milk.
- **Hospitals and other businesses win.** Women who breastfeed need fewer days off for child care because their children are healthier.¹¹

Infant formula samples are not really “free”

- **The brand name formulas that are distributed are up to 66 percent more expensive than store brands.** But mothers who start using one brand of formula are likely to stick with it in the long run, making formula samples far from “free.”¹² If they continue using the brand name formulas given for “free” in discharge bags, it will cost at least \$700 extra per year.¹³

Building on successes

- **Most hospitals distribute industry-sponsored formula samples to new mothers – but there has been some improvement in recent years.** In 2007, a study of 3209 U.S. hospitals found that 91 percent were distributing commercial formula samples.¹⁴ A follow-up study of 1239 of those hospitals in 2011 found that 72 percent were distributing formula samples.¹⁵
- **In 2011, Rhode Island became the first state where all birthing hospitals have banned the distribution of formula samples.**¹⁶
- **While these successes are important steps forward, there is a long way to go!**

Take Action

- **Find out if your hospital is giving new mothers formula samples.** Contact your local hospital’s maternity unit and ask if it distributes formula samples. Let us know what you find out. [Email us.](#)
- **Tell your hospital.** Write a letter to your hospital’s president asking that the hospital stop giving out formula samples.
- **Speak with professional staff in your hospital’s maternity units.** Provide them with the facts and urge them to stop giving out the bags.
- **Write an op-ed in your local paper, professional organization publication, or in state or national media outlets explaining the dangers of formula samples.**
- **Contact us for assistance or with any questions.** Email Liz at ebenishai@citizen.org or call 202-588-7746.

Notes

- ¹ R. Sadacharan et al., "Trends in Us Hospital Distribution of Industry-Sponsored Infant Formula Sample Packs," *Pediatrics* 128, no. 4 (2011).
- ² American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Breastfeeding, "Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk (Policy Statement)," *Pediatrics* 115, no. 2 (2005); American Academy of Family Physicians, "Family Physicians Supporting Breastfeeding (Position Paper)," <http://www.aafp.org/online/en/home/policy/policies/b/breastfeedingpositionpaper.html>; Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine, "Position on Breastfeeding," *Breastfeeding Medicine* 3, no. 4 (2008), <http://online.liebertpub.com/doi/pdfplus/10.1089/bfm.2008.9988>; D. C. James and B. Dobson, "Position of the American Dietetic Association: Promoting and Supporting Breastfeeding," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 105, no. 5 (2005); American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists Committee on Health Care for Underserved Women and Committee on Obstetric Practices, "Special Report from Acog. Breastfeeding: Maternal and Infant Aspects," *ACOG Clinical Review* 12, no. 1 (suppl) (2007); National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, "Napnap Position Statement on Breastfeeding," *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* 21, no. 2 (2007); U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Hhs Blueprint for Action on Breastfeeding," Office on Women's Health, <http://www.womenshealth.gov/archive/breastfeeding/programs/blueprints/bluprntbk2.pdf>; World Health Organization and United Nations Childrens Fund, "Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding," World Health Organization, http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/g_s_infant_feeding_text_eng.pdf.
- ³ Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Breastfeeding Report Card-- United States, 2011," <http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/pdf/2011BreastfeedingReportCard.pdf>.
- ⁴ Melissa Bartick and Arnold Reinhold, "The Burden of Suboptimal Breastfeeding in the United States: A Pediatric Cost Analysis," *Pediatrics* 125, no. 5 (2010); A. Donnelly et al., "Commercial Hospital Discharge Packs for Breastfeeding Women," *Cochrane database of systematic reviews* (2000); C.I. Dungy et al., "Effect of Discharge Samples on Duration of Breast-Feeding," *Pediatrics* 90, no. 2 (1992); Kenneth D. Rosenberg et al., "Marketing Infant Formula through Hospitals: The Impact of Commercial Hospital Discharge Packs on Breastfeeding," *Am J Public Health* 98, no. 2 (2008); BJ Snell et al., "The Association of Formula Samples Given at Hospital Discharge with the Early Duration of Breastfeeding," *Journal of Human Lactation* 8, no. 2 (1992); Anne Wright, Sydney Rice, and Susan Wells, "Changing Hospital Practices to Increase the Duration of Breastfeeding," *Pediatrics* 97, no. 5 (1996).
- ⁵ Sadacharan et al., "Trends in Us Hospital Distribution of Industry-Sponsored Infant Formula Sample Packs."
- ⁶ World Health Organization, "International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes," http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/code_english.pdf.
- ⁷ S. Ip et al., "Breastfeeding and Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes in Developed Countries," Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality Publication, U.S. Department of Healthcare and Human Services, <http://www.ahrq.gov/downloads/pub/evidence/pdf/brfout/brfout.pdf>; S. Arenz et al., "Breast-Feeding and Childhood Obesity—a Systematic Review," *International Journal of Obesity* 28, no. 10 (2004).
- ⁸ Ip et al., "Breastfeeding and Maternal and Infant Health Outcomes in Developed Countries.;" Miriam H. Lobbok, "Effects of Breastfeeding on the Mother," *Pediatric Clinics of North America* 48, no. 1 (2001).
- ⁹ Bartick and Reinhold, "The Burden of Suboptimal Breastfeeding in the United States: A Pediatric Cost Analysis."
- ¹⁰ Calculations based on prices of store brand and name brand formulas at Walgreens.com in November 2011 and average consumption of 30 oz. of formula per day.
- ¹¹ R. Cohen, M.B. Mrtek, and R.G. Mrtek, "Comparison of Maternal Absenteeism and Infant Illness Rates among Breast-Feeding and Formula-Feeding Women in Two Corporations," *American Journal of Health Promotion* 10(1995).
- ¹² Michael I. Reiff and Susan M. Essock-Vitale, "Hospital Influences on Early Infant-Feeding Practices," *Pediatrics* 76, no. 6 (1985).
- ¹³ Ban the Bags, "Ban the Bags Tool Kit," <http://banthebags.org/bb-pdf/Toolkit.pdf>.
- ¹⁴ A. Merewood et al., "Us Hospitals Violate Who Policy on the Distribution of Formula Sample Packs: Results of a National Survey," *Journal of Human Lactation* 26, no. 4 (2010).
- ¹⁵ Sadacharan et al., "Trends in Us Hospital Distribution of Industry-Sponsored Infant Formula Sample Packs."
- ¹⁶ Associated Press, "No More Free Infant Formula at Ri Hospitals," USA Today, <http://yourlife.usatoday.com/parenting-family/story/2011-11-29/No-more-free-infant-formula-at-RI-hospitals/51460584/1>.