

PRESS RELEASE

The promotion of breastfeeding concerns everyone

Conference paves the way for a breastfeeding-friendly Germany

Berlin, 5 June 2019. **How can Germany become breastfeeding-friendly? Not only in theory and not only for some, but everywhere, at any time, and for any woman wishing to breastfeed? Women and their social circles should have access to breastfeeding enabling environments at all levels of society. Recent recommendations on breastfeeding promotion in Germany from the Becoming Breastfeeding Friendly research project pave the way towards achieving this goal. The seminal results were presented on 5 June 2019 at the "How breastfeeding-friendly is Germany?" conference. Their contribution to a healthy upbringing and health promotion in children is essential.**

National and international expert groups recommend the promotion of breastfeeding as a natural and preferred form of nutrition for infants. Its significance for the health of mother and child is well documented. There is also much to be said about its positive effects in fostering the mother-infant bond and on the economics of public health expenditure. Despite this, only approximately two thirds of German mothers breastfeed their newborns exclusively - this figure drops significantly in the months following birth. Children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are breastfed less frequently and for shorter periods of time. As a result, they are less likely to benefit from the positive health impacts of breastfeeding. The same is true for children born to young mothers and to women who smoked during pregnancy. Evidently, women and young families do not yet experience breastfeeding-friendly environments everywhere.

First systematic survey

The first systematic survey of the status of breastfeeding promotion in Germany was initiated in September 2017 within the scope of the international research project entitled Becoming Breastfeeding Friendly (BBF). A committee of policy makers, academic experts, practitioners, and media experts systematically researched and analysed data on all important aspects of breastfeeding promotion, based on 54 international BBF assessment criteria. The BBF research project was funded by the German Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (BMEL)) and implemented by the Healthy Start – Young Family Network (Netzwerk Gesund ins Leben (GiL)) and the National Breastfeeding Committee (Nationale Stillkommission (NSK)) in collaboration with the Yale School of Public Health. Healthy Start – Young Family Network is located at the Federal Centre for Nutrition (Bundeszentrum für Ernährung (BZfE)) in the Federal Office for Agriculture and Food (Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung (BLE)).

The results were presented to the public on June 5, 2019 in Berlin at the "How breastfeeding-friendly is Germany?" conference. Around 170 interested parties and stakeholders from diverse domains of breastfeeding promotion attended the event to discuss the future of fostering breastfeeding in Germany with the research project's experts.

Currently, Germany can be described as moderately breastfeeding-friendly based on the BBF evaluation. Its strengths include Legislation and Policies as well as Funding and Resources to

implement important measures which support breastfeeding such as the Maternity Protection Act and parental allowances. However, Germany's performance is particularly weak in the areas of Promotion and Research and Evaluation. The results provide different starting points for improving the general framework of breastfeeding in Germany.

The BBF Committee has collated these into eight recommendations:

- A. Develop a national strategy to promote breastfeeding in Germany.
- B. Develop and implement a joint communication strategy for the promotion of breastfeeding.
- C. Implement standards of evidence-based breastfeeding support and counselling.
- D. Standardise breastfeeding teaching content in the training of physicians and other relevant health professions, provided this has already been established in the respective training programmes. Provide task-based and competence-based further training and education of breastfeeding support and counselling content for physicians and other relevant health professions and facilitators.
- E. Lower the barriers to access evidence-based breastfeeding counselling and support by setting up networks of all local stakeholders.
- F. Encourage more compatible breastfeeding enabling environments at work, higher education and in vocational training by providing targeted information.
- G. Review, document and inform about regulations and practices relating to the marketing of human milk substitutes.
- H. Establish a systematic breastfeeding monitoring system in Germany.

A number of individual breastfeeding activities currently exist, but they lack overall coordination. According to the BBF's general recommendation, Germany needs a national strategy for breastfeeding promotion in order to integrate all measures of the other BBF recommendations. "The promotion of breastfeeding is an important national concern that must be tackled across the whole of Germany. The Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture (Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (BMEL)) will therefore establish a central coordination body for the development and implementation of a national strategy for breastfeeding promotion. With the founding of the Department for Child Nutrition at the Max Rubner Institute (MRI), a major step has already been taken in this direction in order to foster research and evaluation. After all, this is where breastfeeding monitoring for Germany will be developed," announced Dr. Hermann Onko Aeikens, State Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture.

A systematic BBF analysis is unparalleled in Germany. It offers an opportunity to improve the overall breastfeeding framework not just selectively, but also sustainably in all key areas. It would reduce individual and structural barriers to breastfeeding so that even more women would be able to inform themselves and make their own decisions regarding breastfeeding. Breastfeeding mothers would receive professional support throughout the entire breastfeeding period and their actions would be supported. Breastfeeding cannot be taken for granted - especially at the beginning, many women need competent support. A variety of lifestyles and life circumstances must be considered.

"We see it as self-evident that (expectant) families make their own decisions and that all stakeholders in the promotion of breastfeeding respect this informed decision - that is, a woman's decision to breastfeed or not," emphasises Maria Flothkötter, who heads the Healthy Start – Young Family Network and is in charge of the BBF research project. "It is important that all women who wish to breastfeed are given the best possible framework to do so. This is the area where Becoming Breastfeeding Friendly has identified a need for improvement."

Additional information

Recommendations to promote breastfeeding in Germany

A. A national strategy to promote breastfeeding in Germany, which will take into account all other BBF recommendations, and comprise a mission statement, is to be developed. One coordination body will be responsible for coordinating and moderating this process with all parties involved and will draw up the corresponding task packages. The National Breastfeeding Committee (Nationale Stillkommission (NSK)) will be restructured to serve as the Federal Government's strategic and political advisory body and will be more closely integrated into political processes such as the development of a national strategy for promoting breastfeeding.

B. A common communication strategy for the promotion of breastfeeding is crucial to increase the social acceptance of breastfeeding, improve the understanding of breastfeeding as well as improve the relevant support services to promote breastfeeding motivation, in particular for women who breastfeed less frequently and for shorter periods of time.

C. The evidence-based breastfeeding support and counselling for pregnant women and their families by physicians and other relevant health professionals needs to be given higher priority, e.g. with guidelines, directives and the integration of breastfeeding indicators into quality assurance systems, is yet another recommendation.

D. Breastfeeding topics should also be strengthened in basic education, training and further education by disseminating additional training programmes and harmonised teaching content - in line with occupational-specific tasks and competences.

E. Breastfeeding promotion is designed to reach everyone. Families living in stressful life situations should be given specific attention as they often have an increased need for information and support. Linking all local stakeholders who have contact with (expectant) mothers and their social circles into networks allows the access barriers to professional breastfeeding support and counselling and self-help services to be lowered early on during pregnancy.

F. Breastfeeding and work must become more compatible. Neither employers, nor employees, or consultants are sufficiently aware of existing regulations. This is an area where more information needs to be disseminated. At the same time, more structural solutions for the implementation of the Maternity Protection Act are to be developed and the need for legislative intervention is to be reviewed in an effort to extend the scope of application of the legislation to more women.

G. In relation to the marketing of human milk substitutes, we recommend reviewing the implementation of the existing marketing regulations and, where appropriate, consider expanding them, as well as pool and publish any infringements nationwide. The public and in particular facilitators who have contact to families should be informed about the marketing regulations and how to report breaches.

H. Systematic breastfeeding monitoring for Germany with a coordination unit is vital to obtain valid and representative data for the planning and implementation of targeted breastfeeding promotion measures.

About Healthy Start – Young Family Network

Healthy Start – Young Family Network is a network of institutions, professional societies and associations that work with young families. Its objective is to provide parents with coherent messages relating to nutrition and physical exercise so that they and their children can live and thrive in a healthy life. Healthy Start is located at the Federal Centre for Nutrition (Bundeszentrum für Ernährung (BZfE)) in the Federal Office for Agriculture and Food (Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung (BLE)) and is an integral part of the national action plan "IN FORM - Germany's Initiative for Healthy Nutrition and More Exercise". Additional information is available at: www.gesund-ins-leben.de

Eine Einrichtung im Geschäftsbereich des



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Das Netzwerk Gesund ins Leben ist Teil der Initiative IN FORM
und angesiedelt im Bundeszentrum für Ernährung (BZfE).