

# BREASTFEEDING PROMOTION AND PROTECTION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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## SUMMARY

*The purpose of the article is to present the National Breastfeeding Promotion Programme in the Czech Republic in the course of the last decade. It summarizes the main strategies, education and training activities of the National Breastfeeding Committee, its collaboration with the Government, Parliament, IBFAN and UNICEF. The article reviews the relevant studies on infant feeding which illustrate the increase of the prevalence of breastfeeding in the course of the 1990's and reflect the effect of the programme. Recent negotiations with the Ministry of Health have outlined the implementation of the WHO global strategy for infant and young child feeding in the Czech Republic.*

**Key words:** breastfeeding promotion, lactation management, training, education

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## INTRODUCTION

The breastfeeding promotion programme was initiated by a work group of health professionals who established a nongovernmental organization called ANIMA – Prague IBFAN Group in 1990 which joined the International Baby Food Action Network in 1991. At the same time, ANIMA started a collaboration with the UNICEF National Committee (NatCom) which adopted the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative (BFHI) under the supervision of internationally acknowledged experts on lactation management in 1991. The following text presents the various activities of the National Breastfeeding Promotion Programme (NBPP) undertaken during the last decade, evaluates its impact and sets priorities for future.

## THE NATIONAL BREASTFEEDING PROMOTION PROGRAMME

### The National Breastfeeding Committee

In 1993, the National Breastfeeding Committee (NBC) was established under the coordination of the UNICEF NatCom in Prague. The committee gathers the representatives of professional associations (gynaecological, midwife, neonatological, pediatric and pharmaceutical), the Ministry of Health (MoH), medical schools, Baby-Friendly Hospitals (BFH) and ANIMA – Prague IBFAN Group. The committee coordinated the development of educational and training materials – a training manual (1), books (2, 3), leaflets, posters and videotapes, evaluation of BFH candidates and training of health professionals.

The principal WHO and UNICEF documents and guidelines have been translated into the Czech language and published (4-9).

In 1995, altogether 70 members of the NBC and maternity hospital staff participated in a WHO/UNICEF 18 hour training course on lactation management, taught by foreign trainers. Subsequently, trained members of the NBC conducted, in collaboration with the Czech Neonatological and Pediatric Associations (NA and PA), two day comprehensive training courses on infant feeding for pediatricians in different regions of the Czech Republic. 40 out of 105 maternity hospitals in the Czech Republic have already won the BFH Award.

Annually, the NBC coordinates national campaign to promote breastfeeding and raise public awareness on infant feeding issues in collaboration with mass media and municipal authorities during the World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) announced by the World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA).

### Pregraduate Education and Postgraduate Training

In 1993, the Breastfeeding Documentation Centre (BDC) was established at the Centre of Preventive Medicine (CPM) of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Faculty of Medicine of Charles University in Prague. The centre provides current scientific knowledge to the NBC, medical schools, health professionals and the public. The staff of the CPM included breastfeeding and lactation management issues into the medical curriculum of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Faculty of Medicine in collaboration with the Thomayer Teaching Hospital in Prague.

In 2001, the Lactation Centre (LC) and the National Breastfeeding Counselling Service (NBCS) were established at the neonatological department of the Thomayer Teaching Hospital in Prague. The staff of the centre provides telephone and outpatient counselling to breastfeeding mothers, organizes training in lactation management and counselling for health professionals and mothers, publishes educational materials, a bimonthly magazine and runs a web site on breastfeeding issues ([www.kojeni.cz](http://www.kojeni.cz)) with a

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counselling service. The staff of the centre organized conferences on infant feeding in June 2002 and 2003.

### **Collaboration with the Government and Parliament**

The MoH included breastfeeding promotion and protection into its national health policy in 1995. The UNICEF NatCom in collaboration with the working group on the Convention on Children's Rights organized orientation seminars for the Parliament. Members of ANIMA provided expertise on the implementation of regulations on marketing of breastmilk substitutes to the representatives of the MoH, Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI) and the Parliament.

### **Regulations on Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes**

ANIMA has undertaken efforts to incorporate the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes (Code) and the content of subsequent relevant World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions into national legislation. The International Training Seminar on the Implementation of the Code was organized in collaboration with the International Code Documentation Centre (ICDC) Penang and Geneva Infant Feeding Association (GIFA) in the Czech Republic in 1993.

In 1995, ANIMA prepared a draft based on the Code, subsequent WHA resolutions and the Model Law (ICDC Penang) (10). The draft was consulted with lawyers from the ICDC Penang and UNICEF New York and submitted to the legislative department of the MoH, the Committee for Social Affairs and Health Care of the Parliament and to experts who were preparing the legislation on baby foods based on the Commission Directive (91/321/EEC) at the MoA in 1999. The directive on baby foods regulating the quality and labelling of baby foods was adopted in Parliament in 2001.

In November 1999, ANIMA began negotiations with representatives of the MoTI responsible for elaboration of an amendment of the Law on Advertisements based on EU legislation. In the course of the years 2000-2002, ANIMA monitored the process of development of the amendment and provided comments to the MoTI and to the Parliament. The amendment was adopted by the Parliament in June 2002. However, it does not cover all relevant articles of the Code and subsequent WHA resolutions. Experience from countries that have already adopted the Code into national legislation indicates that the restriction of marketing of breastmilk substitutes, bottles and teats has a beneficial effect on infant feeding practices in the short term (11).

ANIMA has been monitoring violations of the Code since 1991. A total of 84% of mothers interviewed in the multicentre survey in 1998-9 reported that they were exposed to the promotion of baby foods (9% at the gynaecologist, 24% in the maternity hospital, 44% at the pediatrician and 49% in the pharmacy) (12).

### **UNICEF Support under the Multi-Country Programme (1998-2002)**

The UNICEF Geneva provided the support of the BFHI in the Czech Republic as part of the Early Childhood Care and Development Programme via the UNICEF NatCom. In 1998, the UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, organized a regional workshop on infant care and nutrition in Prague. The workshop adopted a series of important recommendations on the infant care and nutrition. UNICEF

New York supported the Joint Project of Breastfeeding Support, Promotion and Protection in Central Europe undertaken by the ANIMA – Prague IBFAN Group, Pro Vita Slovakia and Hungarian Association for Breastfeeding in 2000-2002. The objective of the project was to raise professional and public awareness on breastfeeding issues, train maternity staff in lactation management and lactation consultants in breastfeeding counselling. The aim was to provide continuous support for breastfeeding mothers in 10 regions of the Czech Republic. The training centre in the first BFH at the Thomayer Teaching Hospital in Prague in collaboration with the BDC at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Faculty of Medicine of Charles University in Prague provided the training to about 100 members of 10 maternity hospitals. Furthermore, 100 lactation consultants (pediatricians, nurses, midwives) and 65 mothers were trained in lactation counselling.

### **BREASTFEEDING TRENDS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

The Institute of Health Information and Statistics of the Czech Republic has been gathering national data on infant feeding practices reported from maternity hospitals and primary health care professionals since 1993. There is an increasing trend of the prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding on discharge from hospitals (from 83.6% in 1993 to 91.3% in 2002) and the prevalence of breastfeeding at the end of the sixth month (from 9.0% in 1993 to 28.4% in 2002) in the last decade (13). Data obtained from around 100 thousand children in the 5<sup>th</sup> nationwide anthropological research in 1991 showed that only 15.1% of infants were breastfed for 3 to 6 months and 14.4% of infants for a period longer than 6 months (14). Tláškal et al. (1995) found that 20.5% of infants were exclusively breastfed in the 6<sup>th</sup> month in their sample of 158 infants born in Prague in 1993 – 1994 (15).

In 1995, the hospital based survey in the sample of about 300 mothers who gave birth in the first BFH in Prague was undertaken. Approximately 30% of infants were exclusively breastfed and other 20% were breastfed with complementary foods in the 6<sup>th</sup> month after birth (16). In 1996, a field survey on infant feeding practices in a sample of 102 Prague mothers with children 12-16 months old was carried out. The results showed that only 7% of infants were exclusively breastfed and 34% were breastfed with complementary foods for 6 months or longer. At the time of the research, 17% of children were still breastfed (17). The multicentre survey on infant feeding practices carried on in 1998-99 (12) showed the increased prevalence of breastfeeding at the end of the 6th month (23.1% exclusively breastfed and 29.9% breastfed with complementary foods) compared to the prevalence recorded in the nationwide survey in 1991 (14). This comparison indicates the impact of the breastfeeding promotion programme in the Czech Republic undertaken since 1991 on prevalence and duration of breastfeeding.

### **CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE**

In May 2002, the 55<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly adopted a global strategy for infant and young child feeding urging the governments of the Member States to protect, promote and support exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months after birth and then provide

safe and appropriate complementary food with continued breastfeeding for up to two years of age or beyond (8). The NBC has already started negotiations with the MoH as concerns the adoption of the global strategy and guidelines on breastfeeding management at the prenatal, perinatal and postnatal level of the care for the mother and child.

The NBC has already prepared a draft of standards of the care for breastfeeding mother and child based on the WHO, UNICEF and AAP (American Academy of Pediatrics) guidelines (1, 4, 5, 6, 18, 19, 20) which was submitted to professional associations and the MoH. The NBC will urge the government to take appropriate measures to increase knowledge on current WHO/UNICEF guidelines on optimal infant feeding practices and lactation counselling skills among medical, nursing and midwife students and health professionals (esp. pediatricians providing primary health care) and to strengthen infant feeding counselling at the community level (mother-to-mother support groups, more lactation centres in the regions). The efficacy and effectiveness studies provide enough scientific evidence that exclusive breastfeeding can be increased through carefully targeted interventions (19, 21).

## CONCLUSIONS

The efforts to promote breastfeeding in maternities resulted in increasing exclusive breastfeeding rates on discharge from maternity hospitals and also at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> month. High motivation and high level of health education and awareness in mothers, long maternity leave, general acceptance of breastfeeding culture in health professionals and public and high cost of artificial formula also contributed to this trend. In spite of ongoing efforts to promote breastfeeding over the past decade, the present state of infant feeding in the Czech Republic is far from reaching the standard recommended by the WHO and UNICEF.

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