

BREASTFEEDING SAVES LIVES

For more than 40 years, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has promoted breastfeeding to save lives, prevent malnutrition, and enhance the long-term health and prosperity of women and children.



Photo: Karen Kasmauski/MCSP

THE GLOBAL NUTRITION TARGET

In 2012, the World Health Assembly set a goal of increasing the rate of exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months up to at least 50% by 2025. If optimal breastfeeding practices around the world were scaled up to near universal levels, an additional **823,000 children under 5-years-old and 20,000 women could be saved each year.**

THREE POWERFUL EVIDENCE-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS

USAID promotes optimal breastfeeding practices, including early initiation (ideally within an hour of birth), exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months, and continued breastfeeding for up to 2 years or more along with a diverse complementary diet.



Only **44% OF INFANTS** are exclusively breastfed before reaching 6 months.



With USAID support, more than **8.5 MILLION PREGNANT WOMEN WERE REACHED WITH NUTRITION INTERVENTIONS**, including breastfeeding counseling and support, in 2019 alone.



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THE BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING

Good nutrition in the first 1,000 days — from pregnancy through a child's second birthday — is critical to child survival and longer-term health and development.

Exclusive breastfeeding is one of the best ways to provide infants with the perfect blend of essential nutrients and other protective factors during this important period of growth. Breast milk provides ideal nutrition for infants, supports optimal cognitive and physical development, and reduces the risk of deadly diseases like diarrhea and respiratory infections.

For nursing women, breastfeeding improves birth spacing, and reduces the risk of breast and ovarian cancers and chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

How do USAID's Maternal and Child Nutrition programs support breastfeeding?



Educate mothers and families on the benefits of breastfeeding and support optimal infant and young child feeding practices.



Build the capacity of health care providers to provide skilled breastfeeding counseling and care through in-service training, pre-service education, and professional development.



Advance better global and country policies by taking a whole-of-society approach that addresses barriers and creates an enabling environment that encourages and supports breastfeeding.



Strengthen data collection and monitoring to enable countries to better measure and track progress on breastfeeding initiatives.



Support families to breastfeed in crisis contexts by creating spaces that offer mothers safe and private settings, forming mother-to-mother support groups, and counseling families.

Each year a mother breastfeeds, her risk of developing breast **cancer is reduced by 6 percent.**



Nearly **half of all diarrhea episodes** and **one-third of all respiratory infections** could be prevented with good breastfeeding practices.



Breastfeeding is one of the most cost effective nutrition interventions — every **\$1 invested** in breastfeeding results in up to **\$35 in economic returns.**



► **Learn more at**
[usaid.gov/global-health/health-areas/nutrition](https://www.usaid.gov/global-health/health-areas/nutrition)

1. WHO/UNICEF. Global Nutrition Targets 2025: Breastfeeding Policy Brief (2014). Geneva: World Health Organization. https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/149022/WHO_NMH_NHD_14.7_eng.pdf

2. Victora, C. G., Bahl, R., Barros, A. J., França, G. V., Horton, S., Krasevec, J., Murch, S., Sankar, M. J., Walker, N., Rollins, N. C., & Lancet Breastfeeding Series Group (2016). Breastfeeding in the 21st century: epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect. *Lancet* (London, England), 387(10017), 475–490. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)01024-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)01024-7)

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