

Armenia

Code Violations • 2011

How companies violate the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent WHA Resolutions

LOOK WHAT THEY'RE DOING!



This Nestlé booklet shows the 4 stages of protection provided by NAN. For each page which explains the benefits of breastfeeding, the opposite page claims the same benefits when using NAN.



An advertisement on TV promotes **Hipp** juices starting from 4 months.



This cute baby is used to promote **Malutka 2**, a formula from 6 months and a **Malutka** milk porridge from 5 months in a magazine advertisement.



This Celia infant formula named **EXPERT 1** makes outrageous claims like 'smart growth' and 'proper development.'



Humana fails to label products in Armenian but sticks instead to German, the language of its country of origin. These teas are labelled for babies from the first week.

Code Overview

The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes aims to promote safe and adequate nutrition for infants and young children, by protecting breastfeeding and ensuring appropriate marketing of products under its scope.

The Code applies to all products marketed as partial or total replacement for breastmilk, such as infant formula, follow-up formula, special formula, growing-up milk, cereals, juices, vegetable mixes and baby teas. It also applies to feeding bottles and teats.

The Code:

- Bans all advertising and promotion of products to the general public.
- Bans samples and gifts to mothers and health workers.
- Requires information materials to advocate for breastfeeding, warn against bottle feeding and NOT to contain pictures of babies or text that idealise the use of breastmilk substitutes.
- Bans the use of the health care system to promote products.
- Bans free or low-cost supplies.
- Allows health professionals to receive samples but only for research purposes.
- Demands that product information be factual and scientific.
- Bans sales incentives and contact with mothers.
- Requires labels NOT to discourage breastfeeding and to inform fully about the correct use of infant formula and the risks of misuse.

The information in this report was compiled by "Confidence" Health NGO, based on monitoring carried out by volunteers in Yerevan in June 2011.

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In Armenia, breastfeeding can save 60 babies each year

Armenia



Country Profile

Total population: 3,249,500
 Population under 1 year: 44,000
 Population 1-4 years: 154,200
 Annual number of births: 44,825 (2010)
 Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 live births): 10.4
 Exclusive breastfeeding at 6 months: 57.8%*
 Predominant breastfeeding at 4 months: 80.65%*
 Continued breastfeeding at 1 year: 44%*
 Source: *Statistical Yearbook of Armenia 2010*
 *Ministry of Health official statistics 2009

Breastfeeding rates in Armenia are relatively high compared to other countries but the practice is under constant threat from unethical promotion of commercial baby foods and related products. To eliminate commercial pressure from the field of infant feeding, the Government of Armenia has developed a draft law on breastfeeding promotion and regulation of infant food marketing. The draft law, in circulation in Parliament and Government since July 2011, will replace earlier measures which have been shown to be ineffective.

Promotion to the public

Product promotion to the public comes in various forms: billboards in streets and supermarkets, advertisements in the mass media including TV, radio, magazines and the internet. Compared to previous monitoring exercises, the evidence of promotion of products by companies to the public has increased.



You just can't miss them! Big Hipp billboards on show outside supermarkets and on the streets in Yerevan.



The Vinny brand name is given maximum exposure in a shop in Yerevan through a promotional poster, a wall clock and special display counters all bearing the images of the Vinny bear mascot.

This TV ad for Nestle cereals claims that while mothers protect their babies from the outside, Nestle cereals protect babies from the inside by improving the immune system with bifido-bacteria. The cereal is promoted as suitable for babies from 4 months and thus may not be advertised under national law. Claims are forbidden by WHA resolution 58.32 [2005].

TV advertisements

Although Armenia has a law on advertising that clearly bans food advertisements for babies below 6 months, such ads are commonly seen on Armenian TV. The situation is made worse by the availability of Russian TV which shows a lot of ads for infant formula and other baby foods.

Ads in baby magazines

Similarly, Russian magazines abound in Armenia and are widely read by mothers. In just one magazine – My Baby – ads on infant formula, complementary foods and feeding bottles were splashed all over. The ads contain prohibited claims and misleading information.



My Baby magazine in Russian and what lies behind the seemingly innocent cover.

Examples of ads in My Baby:

- From Abbott 'the expert in health', an ad claiming its Similac formula contains nutrients similar to those in breastmilk; improves immunity, promotes growth, brain and visual development and is easily digestible.
- More of the same - an Agusha ad about the multitude of claims for its medley of products, including easy digestibility, allergy prevention, brain and visual development, immunity and growth.
- From Dr. Brown - a feeding bottle ad proclaiming (wrongly) that the product is ideal for combining feeding with breast and bottle.

Promotion in shops

A plethora of discounts and freebies are available in Armenian supermarkets, shops and pharmacies. Free gifts and tied-in sales are common to entice mothers to buy products which are not only expensive but unnecessary.



The sign says: "Dear Women, Buy one and get one for free. Two boxes of Humana Pre for only AMD 2,900 (US\$8)."

Humana infant formula and complementary foods (4 months) offered at a discount on shelves in supermarkets and via catalogue (see purées inset).



Calling attention. A NUK poster draws customers to a full range of products displayed below.

Promotion in healthcare facilities

Visits to health care facilities reveal that even baby friendly hospitals are being used by companies to reach mothers and babies. Violations were found in more than 70% of health facilities visited. Although the visits were aimed at monitoring company practices, not to check on hospitals or health workers, those who collaborate with companies tend to be less cooperative.

Brand endorsement

Company presence is obvious from the multitude of company materials and equipment seen in health facilities. Gifts to hospitals and doctors such as uniforms, clocks, stationery, bearing company and brand logos, are common. When they are prominently displayed and widely used in health facilities, they are perceived by mothers as a form of medical and professional endorsement for a particular product. This is a most effective form of promotion.



These gifts may seem innocuous, even cute, but behind the innocent facade lies promotion. From left: a cute looking toy attached to a stethoscope bearing the Humana company and brand name; a doctor wearing a coat with the Hipp brand name on the breast pocket; Nutricia 2010 calendar showing healthy babies, still on the wall of a polyclinic. Such ploys ensure that both doctors and parents remember the names Humana, Hipp and Nutricia.



This poster on a hospital door actually says "You can buy Agusha here." (Medical endorsement, just what Agusha wants)

Pens and prescription pads from Humana, Nestlé and Celia are found in many maternities, pediatric hospitals and polyclinics.

This HIP folder does not just hold things together. It sends a powerful message.

Time for Hipp?

Information or promotion?

It may seem a harmless – this generous gesture of giving 'information' materials and posters of cute babies and loving mothers to health facilities and doctors. The production quality are impressive, surpassing the materials produced by international agencies, governments and health facilities. It is the images and contents which violate the International Code. Very often, these materials contain idealising images and text including claims about products which are not only promotional but cannot be supported by scientific evidence. In WHA58.32 [2005], claims are banned unless allowed by national laws. Armenian laws do not specifically allow for claims.



Promotional brochures and leaflets in doctors' offices show idealising pictures of happy mothers and healthy babies; they also contain unsubstantiated claims. The one on NAN makes claims on immunity, harmonious growth, optimal brain development and protection from obesity.

Secret donations

Despite being banned, clinics and hospitals still receive secret donations of free formula. In a resuscitation unit of a hospital and in one maternity hospital, Nestlé is reported to have given free supplies of special formula **Alfaré**.

This practice, noted since 2003, is justified by Nestlé if a request is made for such formula. Offering free formula, even if it upon request, is prohibited under WHA resolution 47.5 [1994] and earlier resolutions on the cessation of free supplies.

Other companies like Hipp and Humana are also involved in providing prohibited supplies. Boxes of Hipp and Humana formula were found in a baby friendly hospital but monitors were not allowed to take pictures.



A request form for Alfaré



This Celia brochure misleadingly claims Celia Expert 1 offers ideal nutrition when breastfeeding is impossible. It also claims to prolong the protective benefits of breastfeeding. Celia Expert 2 offers protection from infection and better digestion of nutrients during complementary feeding.



This heartwarming picture of a baby smiling from a Hipp poster pushes the right buttons with moms.

Sponsorship

During the monitoring period, Armenian health professionals were invited to two conferences, one in Moscow on perinatal medicine, sponsored by companies such as Abbott, Bayer, Friso, Nestlé and Nutricia; another in Armenia organised by the Armenian Association of Pediatricians on medical nutrition of young children and sponsored by Lactalis, makers of **Celia**. Conference materials included brochures (see end of pg 3) and memory sticks containing product promotion.

Sponsorship by its very nature creates a conflict of interests. It creates a sense of obligation and a need to reciprocate in some way. It influences the attitude of health professionals to the sponsoring companies and their products. The goodwill that is generated will often result in endorsement of company products¹. This is in conflict with the duty of health professionals to promote breastfeeding. There are two WHA resolutions: 49.15 [1996] and 58.32 [2005] which warn against conflicts of interest. Health professionals should be wary about endorsing products that may cause damage to the health of children.



Promoting goodwill, from left: list of sponsors on the back page of a conference brochure; a NAN ad from the same conference brochure; invitation with the Celia name and logo.

¹Wright C.M., Waterston A.J.R., "Relationships between paediatricians and infant formula milk companies", Archives of Disease in Childhood, 2006; 91: 383-385

Labelling

As with information materials, health and nutrition claims have emerged as a disturbing trend on baby food labels. Under the Code, product labels should not discourage breastfeeding but the idealising statements and logos have the effect of undermining breastfeeding. Many labels are in foreign languages particularly products imported from Germany and Russia. Although Armenia's national strategy of infant feeding recommends complementary feeding from 6 months, several labels on complementary food indicate that these products are suitable from an earlier age. In some cases this could be as early as 1 week. (see cover page bottom right)



Friso's Gold infant formula with added DHA and ARI, sends the message that it is the gold standard in infant nutrition.

What's in a name? Celia Expert 1 infant formula promises smart growth and proper development with optimal proteins.

More claims. This time, Abbott's Similac infant formula says that Abbott is the "Expert in health". Label is in English and shows an idealising toy.

The Humana name itself is in conflict with the Code. Its labels are only in German - violating the national law.

Complementary foods from many companies – Nestlé, Vinny, Malutka, Heinz, Friso, Hipp and Malishok – are labelled as suitable from 4 or 5 months. They all have unsubstantiated claims. Some years ago, following WHA recommendations, Nestlé complementary food labelling actually indicated that products were suitable from 6 months. This has been reversed with the excuse of following Russian standards which are not applicable in Armenia.

Recommendations

In view of the above findings, the draft law on breastfeeding promotion and regulation of infant food marketing in Armenia should contain provisions to eradicate the following:

- Promotion for baby food products, including ALL formula products and complementary foods. The ban should cover all media channels, retail outlets, public places and health facilities.
- Nutrition and health claims regarding baby food products. This would include misleading and idealising statements, logos and other promotional devices on labels.
- Sponsorship and any other forms of inducement to health workers.

To be effective, the proposed law should contain clear provisions on information and education to ensure that parents are enabled to make infant and young child feeding decisions free from commercial influence. There should also be strong penalty provisions to act as deterrent against errant companies.

This pamphlet is part of a series of IBFAN pamphlets which highlight Code violations in selected countries around the world. The benchmark standards are the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions.



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