

UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative Statement on providing infant formula for newborn babies when requested – 8 October 2010

The Baby Friendly Initiative has recently noted several announcements of hospitals stopping free supplies of infant formula for new mothers and linking this to their work to achieve WHO / UNICEF Baby Friendly accreditation. The Baby Friendly Initiative hospital standards do not, and never have, required that mothers supply their own formula milk. The standards state only that mothers who have chosen to bottle feed be shown how to prepare a feed correctly before discharge home and that the hospital does not allow any advertising of formula milk, bottles, teats and dummies to parents.

Some hospitals have successfully removed standard supplies of infant formula and this has the following advantages:

- Mothers can be taught how to prepare feeds correctly using their own equipment
- Staff find it easier to ensure that mothers are competent at preparing feeds before discharge
- Babies are fed using the teats and the formula milk that will be used at home, thereby avoiding any difficulties with transition
- Breastfeeding is protected, as the impression that formula feeding is easier, created by a supply of free, ready-to-use formula is avoided
- The hospital saves the cost of buying formula milk and teats.

It is vital that any hospital considering stopping free supplies of formula milk think very carefully about how this change is communicated to parents. Stating only that it is to encourage breastfeeding or to help the unit achieve Baby Friendly accreditation is likely to cause resentment among those who have made a decision not to breastfeed, whereas highlighting the benefits as outlined above, will create a more rounded understanding of the advantages to everyone.

Hospitals planning this measure should note that as it is **not** a Baby Friendly Initiative requirement, this should not be cited as part of the rationale for the change. Any information to parents, for example in press releases, articles in the local press and leaflets should make clear that this only applies to mothers who have clearly chosen before birth that they will be formula-feeding their baby. The information should reassure mothers that they will be supported to make up the feeds during their stay and this will enhance confidence once home. It should also be clearly stated that infant formula will be provided in emergencies, where mothers are unable to breastfeed. The aim of the information should be to reassure women that they will receive relevant and effective support, whatever their chosen method of feeding.