

Views on "Hong Kong Code of Marketing of Formula Milk and Related Products, and Food Products for Infants & Young Children"

La Leche League Hong Kong 1 April 2017

La Leche League is an international organization with 60 years history of helping families worldwide on breastfeeding. Advising mothers on pumping, supplementation, “not-on –the breasts” feeding strategies are also our daily job.

“The HK Code” is a positive step forward for Hong Kong in strengthening its own policies to support breastfeeding and improved infant nutrition. It will protect both breastfeeding and non- breastfeeding families, as well as healthcare workers from unnecessary and biased feeding information. It can ultimately protect the wellbeing of babies, mothers, adults and the community.

True facts :

1. Around the world, there are studies and evidence showing the detrimental effects of promotion of formula milk in the form of free samples, media advertisement on breastfeeding initiation, exclusivity and duration.

- Marketing of Dietetic Products for Infants and Young Children in Europe Three Decades after Adoption of the International Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes. Berthold Koletzko. Ann Nutr Metab 2011;59:70-72 DOI: 10.1159/000332738

- Donnelly A, Snowden HM, Renfrew MJ, Woolridge MW. Commercial hospital discharge packs for breastfeeding women (Cochrane review). In: The Cochrane Library, Issue 2, 2004. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Protective effects of breastfeeding on child health, infection, morbidities and infant death including SIDS, prevention of diabetes, obesity, adult cancers are confirmed.

- Lancet breastfeeding series

2. Formula milk manufacturers do not spend their money on advertising for nothing. It is a growing market and competition is fierce. Formula milk promotion materials are designed to sell formula to as many mothers as possible. The sooner a mother phases out breastfeeding, the more formula is purchased- this is the incentive of formula milk manufacturers.

According to a local advertising information (admanGo), HK formula milk manufacturers has spent HK\$2,870,000,000 on advertisement a year. With the crude birth rate of around 8/1000 in the past 3 years, the manufacturers actually spent HK \$16000 on each age 0-3 child. And, the cost is paid by parents!

3. Under the present regulations, the advertising of formula intended for babies under six months is not permitted, so formula manufacturers have instead focused their efforts on promoting follow-on milks.

In order to make their products stand out, ingredients with nutritional and health claims are added. Those claims are challenged and proved to have inadequate reliable scientific evidence.

The “cross- promotion” is yet intentional. Packing of formula milk of different stages is almost identical. This marketing strategy is targeted with promotion of related products. i.e. newborn formula.

4. La Leche League, as an expertise in breastfeeding, recommending a specific infant formula is beyond our scope. However, our leaders are aware of and are interested in nutrition.

Under the heavy influence of advertisement, it is not well enough known that all formula milks have to be of a very similar composition to comply with the requirement in CODEX STANDARD.

Does parents need advertisement to tell which product or brand is better?
No.

5. Formula milk manufacturers claimed formula milk is the “best alternative “ to breast milk, which is not true. Donated banked human milk is the best alternative instead.

6. Nursing at breasts is the best feeding method. Apart from bonding and parenting issues, breastfeeding at breast is proved to be related to longer duration of breastfeeding and rate of exclusive breastfeeding compared with breastmilk or artificial milk feeding with bottles.

Not nursing at breast does not mean immediate use of artificial teats and bottles. There are many other methods to feed and to comfort the babies. There is strong evidence showing use of artificial teats and bottles is one of the barriers to successful nursing at breasts, especially in the first month of life.

7. “The WHO Code” is known and followed by many governments globally, in contrast to what formula milk manufacturers have said.

- Marketing of breast-milk substitutes: national implementation of the international code: status report 2016. World Health Organization 2016.

ACCESS TO NUTRITION INDEX (2016) which looked at how far companies are complying, or not, with the Code, reviewed that ALL formula milk companies in the report fell short of the recommendations set out in the Code.

- LINK: <https://www.accesstonutrition.org/bms-ranking>

8. Local children are over-dependent and are consuming far too much formula milk which displaces healthy balanced diet. And, this phenomenon is highly likely due to unnecessary advertisement of follow-on / grow-up formula milk.

- *Survey of Infant & Young Child Feeding in Hong Kong: Milk Consumption (DH,2012)*. Link: http://www.fhs.gov.hk/english/archive/files/reports/Survey_IYCF_milkconsumption_1904.pdf

9. The Feeding Products for Babies and Children (Advertising and Promotion) Bill were read at UK parliament aimed to legislate advertisement of and full implementation of WHO code in Nov 2016 & Feb 2017.

- <http://www.alisonthewliss.scot/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Consultation-on-the-Feeding-Products-for-Babies-and-Children-Bill.pdf>

La Leche League Hong Kong urges The Hong Kong Government :

1. The HK Code has to be implemented and to follow the WHO code which covers formula milk, food, artificial teats and bottle for children under age 36 Months.
2. Formula milk manufacturers and retailers should not promote or advertise any breast milk substitute to the public or to healthcare professionals, or to perform breastfeeding education.
3. Thanks to formula manufacturers, LegCo members, the public on the importance of other policies in promoting and protecting breastfeeding . All these policies including establishment of donor human milk bank are not mutually exclusive to each other, but, should all be proceeded as soon as possible.
4. Effective monitoring and evaluation to the compliance of the HK Code must be performed, any non- complaint parties should be named.

Formula milk manufacturers' own experiences confirm that they have ignored and will ignore a code that is not legislated. Hong Kong shall consider law implementation to ensure compliance to the code.