

NUTRITION ADVOCACY IN PUBLIC INTEREST-India (NAPi)

May 6, 2020

To All Chief Secretaries, States of India.

Sub: Concerns regarding free supplies of commercial baby foods in response to COVID-19, with a request to stop

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are a national think tank on nutrition –consisting of independent experts in epidemiology, human nutrition, community nutrition and pediatrics, medical education, administration and management; having decades of experience in respective fields. We have come together to advocate on nutrition policy in public interest.

We like to express the following concerns and reasons to request you **for initiating action in your State.**

1. We hope you are aware that health and nutrition of lactating mothers, infants and young children is of critical concern being vulnerable. Mothers are under tremendous stress in these times, which may reduce the flow of breastmilk.
2. We have received reports from at least 3 States, [NGOs and police have been distributing free commercial baby foods to mothers](#) with very young children. (Please see the attached information.
3. Such a distribution of commercial products comes with health risks to the child, e.g. diarrhoea and malnutrition. It even displaces breastfeeding and normal nutritious diet. It undermines women's confidence in breastfeeding.
4. For the above reasons, a Central law; the *Infant Milk Substitutes Feeding Bottles, and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992, and Amendment Act 2003*, prohibits donations and free supplies. Section 5 (a) of this Act prohibits free donation and distribution of infant milk substitutes like infant formula to any other person except to an orphanage.
5. According to a [UNICEF](#) Covid-19 guidance, "Donations for unhealthy foods should not be sought or accepted for targeted or blanket distribution during the emergency response by the Government and partners".
6. According to [WHO](#), the use of powder milk formulas carries a potential health hazard without proper instructions of its preparation.

In the interest of most vulnerable populations, women and children, **we therefore request you to issue necessary instructions for your State/District to all concerned** providing relief to the public to,

- a). **Avoid** free distribution of products like infant formula unless it is medically indicated (WHO's Guidance) and supervised. This especially true for breastfed children under 2.
- b). **Include** "Supply of provisions to meet the needs of infants/ small children • Counselling for lactating mothers", (as per NDMA Plan 2019), which is critical to maintaining breastmilk supply from mother to the baby.

Sincerely,

Members of NAPi

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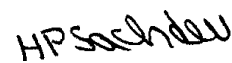
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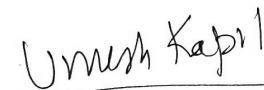
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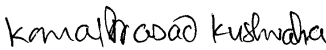
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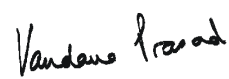
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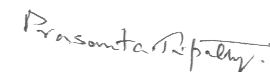
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