

PRESS RELEASE

A new global analysis calls for breast milk feeding as a “Primary Public health Intervention”

Swiss regulations require a company to offer a mother with a baby at least 90 paid minutes for breastfeeding or breast milk pumping in a working day.ⁱ Federal infant nutrition guidelinesⁱⁱ recommend exclusive breastfeeding for four to six months, as well as longer paid leave for new fathers to be able to support breastfeeding mothers. Is this too much investment? Or do current breast milk feeding support measures not go far enough?

- Breast milk feeding prevents long- and short-term diseases, from bowel tissue death to diabetes
- Universal breastfeeding could add USD 300 billion to the gross national income worldwide each year
- New cost-benefit analysis shows that low-cost breast milk feeding interventions result in high returns on investment in the short- and long-term for global society

Baar, Switzerland/Paris, France – 26 February 2018. Who stands to gain when babies get mother’s milk? According to the most recent meta-studies of both full-term and premature babies: Everyone. At the 13th International Breastfeeding and Lactation Symposium in Paris, March 22 - 23, Prof. Tricia Johnson, Economist in the Department of Health Systems Management at Rush University, presents overwhelming new evidence for making breast milk feeding a primary public health intervention, as fundamental to a nation’s health and prosperity as vaccinations.

Nobel Prize for Medicine and Economics

In his 2016 article in *The Lancet*ⁱⁱⁱ, World Bank Vice President for Human Development, Keith Hansen, placed breastfeeding at the top of the global economic agenda by stating, “If breastfeeding did not already exist, someone who invented it today would deserve a dual Nobel Prize in medicine and economics.” He went on to cite that universal breastfeeding could save over 800,000 children’s lives and 20,000 mothers’ lives every year. The average IQ increase of three points for breastfed babies could raise productivity, adding USD 300 billion to annual gross national income worldwide. Preventing diseases from diarrhoea to diabetes, breastfeeding could also reduce global healthcare costs by hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

For premature babies, mother’s milk is a risk-free vaccine

Also in 2016, the York Health Economics Consortium conducted the world’s first economic model for premature babies and human milk^{iv}. Feeding breast milk to a single, annual UK population of premature babies could reduce direct healthcare costs by £30.1 million in the first year alone by preventing diseases like necrotising enterocolitis, sepsis, leukaemia, and otitis media. Prof. Johnson affirms that the York study “proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that breast milk is a vaccine, with no side effects, against an array of devastating illnesses.”

Why is breast milk feeding still not a “primary public health intervention”?

Despite this growing body of evidence, policy makers are slow to act. At the 13th International Breastfeeding and Lactation Symposium, Prof. Johnson will present, for the first time, a new cost-benefit analysis showing the remarkably low economic investment required to feed human milk to babies, and the high return on investment for society in both the short- and long-term. The question becomes: With nothing to lose and everything to gain, is society doing enough to support mothers and families in breast milk feeding?

About Medela

Founded in 1961 and headquartered in Switzerland, Medela conducts basic research in partnership with leading scientists, medical professionals and universities, to develop world-leading breastfeeding products, education, and solutions. Find out more at www.medela.com.

More Information:

- Prof. Tricia Johnson, abstract, "[Leveraging the economic perspective of the value of human milk](#)"
- 2018 speaker summaries (attachment)
- [2018 symposium programme](#)
- [Journalist registration page](#)
- [Information on press conference, 22 March 8:30–10:00](#)
- [Highlights and images from 2017 Symposium](#)

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References

ⁱ Verordnung 1 zum Arbeitsgesetz (ArGV 1); 1. Juni 2014 5. Kapitel: Sonderschutz von Frauen; 1. Abschnitt: Beschäftigung bei Mutterschaft; Art. 60 Arbeitszeit und Stillzeit bei Schwangerschaft und Mutterschaft; (Art. 35 und 35a ArG)

ⁱⁱ <https://www.eek.admin.ch/eek/de/home/pub/ernaehrung-in-den-ersten-1000-lebenstagen-.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Breastfeeding: a smart investment in people and in economies. Hansen, Keith. The Lancet, Volume 387, Issue 10017, 416

^{iv} Modelling the cost-effectiveness of human milk and breastfeeding in preterm infants in the United Kingdom. Mahon et al. Health Economics Review (2016) 6:54 DOI 10.1186/s13561-016-0136-0