

PROTECTING BREASTFEEDING

Medical Clinics Have a Role to Play

Have you ever been offered commercial infant formula samples, or materials with a commercial infant formula company's logo on them, to give to your clients?

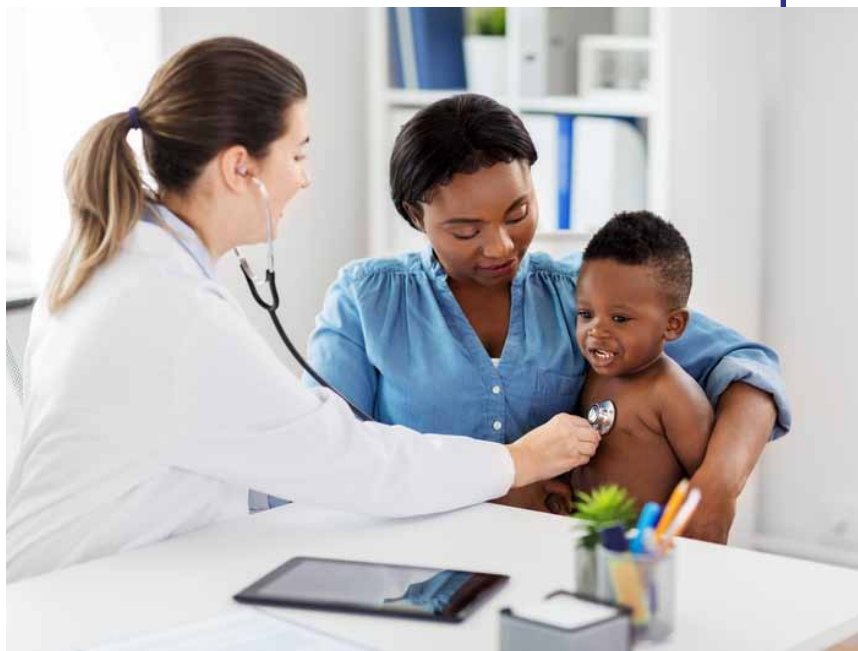
Commercial infant formula manufacturers invest huge amounts of money to market their products. This exerts intense pressure on parents as well as the health system. The pervasive presence of advertising can make people believe the products are equivalent to or even superior to human milk.^{1,2}

Using health facilities and medical professionals to promote commercial infant formula is a frequently used marketing strategy.³

What are the repercussions and the ethical issues of these practices?

What risk does the appearance of a conflict of interest entail?

Health professional and medical staff have a major influence on decisions made by families. Medical clinics have a vital role to play in supporting people who are breastfeeding or who are planning to breastfeed.



“Governments, health care facilities and health care providers should make every attempt to adhere to the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes* and relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions.”⁴ *Canadian Paediatric Society*

THE IMPACT of Marketing Strategies on Breastfeeding

A perception that health professionals are more supportive of the use of commercial infant formula than breastfeeding has an influence on parents' infant feeding decisions.⁵

Drop in exclusive breastfeeding rates

Several studies have shown the negative impact that distribution of commercial infant formula samples by health professionals has on exclusive breastfeeding rates, especially when they are given to vulnerable women.^{6,7,8}

Early weaning

Only 8% of women stop breastfeeding at the time they had planned. The main reason they give for stopping breastfeeding earlier is their perception that they are not making enough milk⁹, even though insufficient milk production is rare and often associated with the use of bottles or bottle nipples.

“When I was pregnant with my first baby, I hadn't decided yet if I wanted to breastfeed. When I went for my first prenatal appointment, I saw coupons for a commercial infant formula brand and figured that if my doctor recommended that product, it must be because it was better than breast milk.”

Stéphanie, mother of Maxim

“At the new clinic I started going to, they don't have any commercial infant formula advertising. I feel a lot more comfortable talking about breastfeeding, even with a doctor I don't know. I'm not afraid that they will discourage me from continuing to breastfeed, the way I used to be.”

Karima, mother of Fatiha

Did you know?

\$55 billion market in 2019

The global market for breast milk substitutes is extremely lucrative and is flourishing. The world's production has doubled between 2005 to 2019.¹⁰

In favour of the Code

Many professional associations have taken positions supporting the Code, including the Canadian Paediatric Society⁴ and the College of Family Physicians of Canada.¹¹

The Ministry of Health and Social Services of Québec encourages compliance with the Code to improve the duration and exclusivity of breastfeeding in order to protect the health of babies, even in medical clinics that are not “Baby-Friendly Initiative” certified.¹²

First 6 months

Health Canada and other organizations recommend breastfeeding exclusively for the first six months of life.¹³

2 years and more

These organizations also recommend sustained breastfeeding for up to two years or longer with appropriate complementary feeding after six months.¹³

A code that aims to protect all families

In order to protect breastfeeding, while ensuring the safe use of breast milk substitutes, including commercial infant formula, when necessary, Canada is a signatory to the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes* (the Code)¹⁴, adopted in 1981 at the World Health Assembly (WHA) by a 118 nations. Since then, the Code has been regularly updated by WHA resolutions.¹⁵ The Code's purpose is not to prohibit the use of breast milk substitutes, but to ensure *“that they are not distributed in ways that harm the protection and promotion of breastfeeding.”*

INSPIRING IDEAS to Respond to the Needs of All Families

PRODUCTS WITHIN THE SCOPE of the *International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes*

- All food and beverages for children under 36 months of age
- Bottles and nipples
- Pacifiers



Article 6.2 of the Code stipulates that *“No facility of a health care system should be used for the purpose of promoting commercial infant formula or other products within the scope of this Code.”*¹⁴

Article 7.3 adds that *“No financial or material inducements to promote products within the scope of this Code should be offered by manufacturers or distributors to health workers or members of their families, nor should these be accepted by health workers or members of their families.”*¹⁴.

An **internal policy** is a useful tool that allows you to respond appropriately to any situation while at the same time protecting breastfeeding.

Promoting community breastfeeding services, by displaying posters or distributing flyers, for example, encourages women to contact breastfeeding support services as soon as they are pregnant. This ensures that women will receive effective and individualized support as long as they need it or until they wean. Directing people with general questions about breastfeeding or who need to be reassured to these resources is a good way of meeting their needs.

Displaying **posters and visuals without bottles or pacifiers** helps counter the tendency to make bottles and artificial nipples seem normal.

Commercial infant formula should be discussed only with parents who need it and in private consults. This reduces the perception of other families that commercial infant formula is necessary or normal.

Families in vulnerable situations who use commercial infant formula can be directed to **food banks**.

Notify the MAQ when you see **manufacturers or advertisements violate the Code**. This helps build strategies to combat these unethical practices.

Applying the Code
protects breastfeeding

THE APPEARANCE OF A CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The better supported women feel by the medical staff, the better able they will be to meet their personal breastfeeding goals.

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All of the following practices present an apparent conflict of interest; they are forms of advertising commercial infant formula or related products. When they occur in medical clinics, they benefit manufacturers by giving credibility to their products. **Avoiding these practices contributes to the health of children and their mothers.**

- Distribution of samples of products
- Distribution of discount coupons
- Displaying or distributing promotional material
- Using materials with the logo or brand name of a manufacturer
- Collecting names in order to send advertisements or samples of products to families (for example, through draws or contests)



Your
breastfeeding friendly
resource

MouvementAllaitement.org

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BREASTFEEDING RESOURCES

Community Resources

Trained support people

Community workers and volunteers who provide breastfeeding support have received basic education and training to enable them to answer a wide range of questions. They can also identify common breastfeeding difficulties and suggest solutions.

Peer support

Peer support has a proven positive effect on breastfeeding duration and exclusivity.^{1,2} Breastfeeding volunteers have personal experience and provide support to help other breastfeeding parents reach their goals. Peer supporters may provide remote, virtual, or in-person services individually or in groups. Optimal results are associated with programs connecting an expectant parent with a volunteer during pregnancy.

Where to find community breastfeeding support services

In Quebec, search by region:

mouvementallaitement.org/ressources

In other locations in Canada:

safelyfed.ca/canadian-breastfeeding-resources

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When to access these resources?

Any time! Whether parents have a quick question or are worried about a particular situation, such as being separated from their child or weaning, breastfeeding support people can help.

Are their services limited to breastfeeding support?

The range of services provided by community support people varies. They can also suggest reliable sources of information and services to help with parenting and nutrition questions.

Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs)

Certified professionals

Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) are specialists in breastfeeding who have clinical expertise. IBCLCs are certified by the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners.

Specialized services

IBCLCs work within a professional framework that includes a scope of practice and a code of ethics. They are qualified to conduct comprehensive examinations to resolve persistent or complex breastfeeding issues. An IBCLC may work for a health authority, a community organization, a pharmacy, a specialized breastfeeding clinic, or a medical clinic, or they may have a private practice.



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