

Mum's milk cuts death rate

85% reduction in infant mortality due to initiatives taken over 30 years

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia has managed to reduce the mortality rate for children under the age of five by 85% over the past 30 years, thanks to initiatives taken by the Government to promote breastfeeding.

Hospital Kuala Lumpur (HKL) paediatrics and neonatology consultant Dr Farah Inaz Syed Abdullah said this was the best way to reduce the risk of infant mortality because breast milk provided nutrients and long-lasting active immunity that helped maintain the health of a child until adulthood.

"If infants across the world were breastfed during the golden hour, which is the first hour after birth, it is estimated that one million child deaths could be avoided," she said.

"This is because during the first feeding, the baby will be fed with colostrum, the first milk that contains the right amounts of nutrients in the right proportions."

Dr Farah Inaz said colostrum also contained antibodies that could protect the newborn from diseases.

"It acts as the first immunisation for the newborn," she added.

Universiti Putra Malaysia senior medical lecturer and specialist in obstetrics and gynaecology Dr Maiza Tusimin said breastfeeding could also reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), which usually occurred due to choking.

"SIDS often affects babies fed with infant formula through a bottle. This



Simply the breast: Mothers feeding their babies in an awareness event in this file picture.

risk can be reduced as breast milk is given in an exclusive manner, besides the fact that it also contains lipase, an enzyme that aids in the digestion of fats naturally," she said.

Although there were attempts via modern technology to imitate and develop infant formula closest to breast milk, Dr Maiza said the nutrition and natural goodness contained in breast milk remained unmatched.

Head of National Lactation Centre

Dr Noor Haliza Yusoff said in a bid to promote breastfeeding, the Health Ministry had established baby-friendly hospitals since 1993.

Dr Noor Haliza, who is also HKL obstetrics and gynaecology senior consultant, said in 1998, Malaysia had also received the World Health Organisation's recognition as the third country in the world, after Sweden and Oman, to have successfully accredited all public hospitals as baby-friendly hospitals.

"All government hospitals in Malaysia have achieved the status of baby-friendly hospital, where all newborns are only fed with breast milk while in hospital.

For the record, over 170 countries, including Malaysia, are participating in the celebration of World Breastfeeding Week from Aug 1 to Aug 7 each year.

This year, it was celebrated with the theme Breastfeeding: A Winning Goal For Life. — Bernama