

# Breastfeeding reduces child mortality by 85pc over 30 years

**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia has reduced the mortality rate for children under the age of 5 by 85 per cent 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 recently breastfeeding was the best way to reduce the risk of death among infant and children because breast milk provided nutrients and long-lasting active immunity that helped maintain the health of the child until adulthood.

“If children across the world were breastfed during the golden hour, that is the first hour after birth, it is estimated that one million child deaths could be avoided.

“This is because during this first feeding, the child will be fed with colostrum, the first milk that contains the right amounts of nutrients, in the right proportions for the newborn.

“What makes it unique is that the amount of nutrients in breast milk

changes as the baby grows.”

Farah said colostrum also contained antibodies that could protect the newborn from various diseases, such as diarrhoea, colds and lung inflammation.

In fact, it acted as the first immunisation for the newborn, she said.

Universiti Putra Malaysia senior medical lecturer and specialist in obstetrics and gynecology, Dr Maiza Tusimin, said breastfeeding could also reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

“SIDS often happens to babies who were fed with infant formula through a bottle. This risk can be reduced as breast milk is given in an exclusive manner and full of attention, besides the fact that it also contains lipase, an enzyme that aids in the digestion of fats naturally.”

Although modern technology had tried to imitate and develop infant formula closest to breast milk, Maiza said the nutrition and natural goodness contained in breast milk remained unmatched.

Head of National Lactation Centre

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

The 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 will only be fed with breast milk while in the hospital.”

She said by breastfeeding their babies, mothers would be able to lose weight and reduce the risk of having breast or ovarian cancer, osteoporosis or close pregnancies.

Over 170 countries, including Malaysia, participate in celebrating World Breastfeeding Week from Aug 1 to 7 each year.

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