

Q&A: WHO CODE

Why improved implementation matters in Canada

What is the WHO Code?

The [WHO Code](#) refers to the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly Resolutions. It provides minimum requirements for regulating the marketing of human milk substitutes such as commercial infant formula, follow-up formula, and infant feeding equipment such as bottles.

Why does the marketing of commercial infant formula need to be regulated?

It is important to ensure that the marketing and labelling of commercial infant formula and related products do not misrepresent the product or make it sound the same or better than human milk. The formula industry has an annual profit of over \$75 billion Canadian dollars. Aggressive marketing practices are often used by companies to increase their reach and increase their financial profit.

What is aggressive marketing?

Aggressive marketing of infant formula includes distributing free formula to new parents, encouraging people to join pregnancy/baby clubs and then using their personal information to send advertisements and coupons for formula, using social media and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to target new parents, and having influencers talk about the benefits of formula feeding and disadvantages/hardships of breastfeeding. Some companies also spread incorrect information to undermine breastfeeding. The public often doesn't realize this is happening in Canada.

Why would companies use aggressive marketing?

Undermining breastfeeding can sway people to not breastfeed or breastfeed for a shorter time. This, in turn, increases formula use and leads to increased profits for formula companies.

What about parents that want to feed infant formula? Some people cannot breastfeed for medical or personal reasons and some want to breastfeed and also feed infant formula.

Parents who intend to feed their infant formula deserve factual information about the products available to them. This supports them to make an informed decision about feeding their baby. Misleading marketing claims and forceful tactics to promote specific products undermine parent's informed decision making. Changing our current Canadian regulations can help protect parents and babies from the negative impacts of inappropriate and aggressive marketing practices.

How can writing a letter to my federal government representative (MP) help?

Health Canada will soon be revising acts and regulations to prevent formula shortages in Canada. They also plan to modernize the regulations so they are in line with other developed countries. Your letter can show your MP that you expect the revised Canadian regulations to protect families from aggressive and inappropriate marketing and labeling practices.

We have provided a sample letter to help you.