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Ministry of Health

“Suwasiripaya”, 385,

Rev. Baddegama Wimalawansa Thero Mawatha,

Colombo 10.

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All Deputy Director Generals of Ministry of Health

Provincial Directors of Health Services

Regional Directors of Health Services

All Directors of Ministry of Health, Decentralized Units and Special Campaigns

All Heads of Institutions

**Facilitation of Practice of National Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) Recommendations
on Breastfeeding within Health Institutions; Establishment of Breastfeeding Rooms**

The national policy of Sri Lanka regarding breastfeeding is that an infant should be exclusively breastfed until completion of 6 months and then to continue breastfeeding together with timely, appropriate and safe complementary feeding from 6 months till two years of age or beyond (National Nutrition Policy 2010, Maternal and Child Health Policy 2012). Scientific evidence has shown that breastfeeding is vital for the survival, optimal physical and mental growth and development of infants and young children thus ensuring good health and productivity of the future generation. Therefore, this is of immense national interest as one of the key investments for the country.

Taking above aspects into consideration, at present Sri Lanka is in a stage of further strengthening the implementation of IYCF activities by identifying remaining gaps in the existing policy and programmes on breastfeeding and complementary feeding.

Under the current provisions provided for government employees under the Establishment Code – Chapter XIII, female employees in the government sector even though do not get full pay leave for the first 6 months, receive 84 working days of paid leave and thereafter 84 days half pay leave and another 84 days no pay leave. For women opting to return to work after first 84 days of paid leave, one hour nursing break is offered until the baby is 6 months old; i.e. the period until which the baby should be exclusively breastfed. After the first six months, it is recommended to continue breastfeeding till 2 years and beyond.

Employees in the other sectors covered under the Shop and Office Act and Maternity Benefits Ordinance receive much less benefits when compared with the Establishment Code.

Therefore, for breastfeeding women returning to work before the baby turns 6 months and for the breastfeeding women with babies less than 2 years, support from the work place is needed to continue breastfeeding. Unavailability of facilities to express breast milk at workplace affects the milk production of a mother and leads to premature weaning (gradual cessation of breastfeeding) which will have a negative influence on the baby i.e. infants are more susceptible to infections/ill health if not breastfed which would lead to absenteeism from work of the parents leading to reduced productivity.

In order to provide the required facilities to lactating mothers who are employed in health sector, the Ministry of Health has already started establishing "Breastfeeding Rooms" in government health institutions.

Such a facility should accommodate lactating mothers to express breast milk at regular intervals during their working hours so that the process of breastfeeding is facilitated. A **Breastfeeding Room** thus established should have the following;

- i. A suitable location accessible and acceptable to all women employees
- ii. A confined space with adequate privacy (e.g. a cubicle or a screened area)
- iii. Seating space with adequate seating facilities suitably screened to ensure privacy
- iv. Wash basin
- v. (If possible) a storage/refrigeration facility to keep expressed breast milk
- vi. One such facility per ≤ 120 female workers

Please bring the contents of this circular to the notice of all relevant staff and make arrangements to establish 'Breastfeeding Rooms' at your institutions.

Promoting, Supporting and Protection Breastfeeding is an Investment for the Future.

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Secretary – Health

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