



Report shames lax UK formula marketing regulations as Italy prepares to take action to protect breastfeeding and babies fed on formula

Baby Milk Action is a non-profit organisation which aims to save lives and protect infant and young child health through independent controls on babyfood marketing.

We are a member of the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), a network of over 200 citizens groups in more than 100 countries.

www.babymilkaction.org

www.ibfan.org

IBFAN, the International Baby Food Action Network, has released an illustrated report *Breaking the Rules, Stretching the Rules 2007* on multinational companies violating rules on marketing adopted by the World Health Assembly (WHA) (1).

The 150-page report gives graphic details of the insidious ways in which a dozen heavyweight companies (2) compete with mother's milk.

Aggressive marketing in the UK by companies such as NUMICO (owners of Milupa and Cow & Gate brands), Wyeth (owner of the SMA brand), Heinz (owner of the Farley's brand) and Hipp features heavily in the report as the lax marketing regulations appear to make the country a test-bed.

Right: The NUMICO profile highlights how health workers and parents are targeted directly by company representatives in the UK.

In the UK, Cow & Gate portrays itself as an extension of health workers by sending them leaflets which includes the caption "Unfortunately, I have only one pair of ears" on the one side and on the other, the statement "That's why we're (Cow & Gate) here to help". Health workers who respond can be eligible for a prize draw to win £250 in Marks & Spencers vouchers. Careline cards are included in the mailing for health workers to hand to mothers.

When mothers are on the company database, they receive direct mail such as this leaflet with the caption "I'm thinking of getting a t-shirt made - 'Danger! Sore boobs!'"

An effective way to discourage breastfeeding.

The use of professional service representatives, mother craft nurses or similar personnel provided or paid for by companies is prohibited. Likewise, financial and material inducements to promote products are disallowed. Furthermore, WHA resolution 58.32 (2005) warns against conflict of interests where incentives are given for programmes and professionals working in infant and young child health.

LOOK AT THIS!

VIOLATION

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Member States of the European Union are revising regulations on the marketing of breastmilk substitutes following a new EU Directive, which has the aim of implementing the WHA *International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes*. Patti Rundall OBE, Policy Director at Baby Milk Action and co-author of the report *Protecting breastfeeding – Protecting babies fed on formula* submitted to the UK government consultation on behalf of the UK coalition, the Baby Feeding Law Group, said:

"It is shameful that so many of the innovations in aggressive marketing are coming from the UK. A broad coalition representing all the leading health professional and lay organisations are unanimous in calling for the Code and Resolutions to be implemented for the sake of all babies – those who are breastfed and those who are fed on formula. Even the government's own advisors, SACN, are calling for stronger regulations. We welcome the fact that Italy plans to include in its legislation important provisions of the Code, such as a ban on the promotion of follow-on milks and controls of sponsored information. We call on our Government to listen to its advisors and set a positive example to other countries instead of caving in to the industry and undermining them."

On 21 November the Government suggested it would not introduce measures called for by the Baby Feeding Law Group and its own Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, unlike Italy, which planning to introduce some measures. Dr. Adriano Cattaneo, epidemiologist and president of

IBFAN Italy and coordinator of the EU-funded projects for a Blueprint for Action for the Protection, Promotion and Support of Breastfeeding, said:

“The report demonstrates why governments have to show the courage to regulate the baby food industry. I am pleased that the Italian government’s draft regulations implementing a new European Union Directive will ban follow-on formula advertising and I hope that other nations in Europe and elsewhere will support this action and close this and other loopholes in their own countries.”

The global monitoring report contains results from 67 countries where companies were evaluated against World Health Assembly marketing requirements introduced since 1981. The report shows that Nestlé, the target of an international boycott and dominant market player, continues widespread violations. It also reveals that the failure to regulate such practices has encouraged other companies, such as the huge NUMICO group (1), to use similar practices to obtain what NUMICO calls ‘stomach share’ (3) from competitors and from breastfeeding. With NUMICO entering into strong competition with Nestlé in the Asian market, the monitoring has found its violations have increased to rival those of Nestlé. This could provoke consumer action, such as the widely supported Nestlé boycott.

Yeong Joo Kean, Legal Advisor to IBFAN and co-author of the report, said:

“The marketing of infant formula, follow-on formula, complement-tary foods and feeding equipment continues to be such a very lucrative business that companies deliberately ignore WHO recommendations in order to compete intensely with one another and against breastfeeding.”

Aggressive marketing strategies undermine breastfeeding and mislead those parents and carers who do use formula. Baby Milk Action has exposed how in the UK companies fail to warn parents that powdered formula is not sterile or to give clear instructions on how to reduce the risks of possible contamination with bacteria.

Evidence for the report was compiled from June 2004 to October 2007 by monitors in 67 countries from all continents. Some 3000 violation reports were recorded and analysed (2).

For further details, images and to obtain the report, see the on-line version of this press release at: <http://www.babymilkaction.org/press/press29nov07.html>

Contacts: Baby Milk Action on (UK): 01223 464420. Mike Brady mobile: 07986 736179.
Patti Rundall mobile: 07786 523493
Yeong Joo Kean on (Malaysia): 60 4 890 5799

Notes for editors

(1) The International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and 12 subsequent relevant World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions. BTR 2007 was launched at the conclusion of the East Asia and Pacific Training Course on implementing the International Code.

(2) Companies in the report are: Abbott Ross, Bayer, Danone, Friesland, Gerber, Heinz, Hipp, Humana, Mead Johnson, Nestle, Numico, Wyeth and 12 feeding bottle and teat manufacturers.

(3) “stomach share”...NUMICO estimates that only 30% of all food consumed in the first 3 years of life is commercially manufactured. The company has a strategy to capture a larger share of the baby’s stomach worldwide

(4) “Breaking the Rules, Stretching the Rules 2007” was published by ICDC, the International Code Documentation Centre, an IBFAN office which specializes in Code implementation. Soft copies of the report are available on the IBFAN website. Hard copies will be released in December.