



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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6th. October 2021

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore
TD
Dail Eireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ45729/21: To ask the Minister for Health when Ireland will fully implement the WHO code of marketing for breastfeeding and what efforts have been made to date to address ethical concerns regarding the advertisement of formula milk for babies; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Whitmore,

The above PQ has been forwarded to my Department for direct response to you on same.

The WHO Code is a set of recommendations to regulate the marketing of breast milk substitutes, feeding bottles and teats. The code aims to stop the aggressive and inappropriate marketing of breast-milk substitutes and is in line with recommendations from the Department of Health and HSE which support breastfeeding as the optimum source of nutrition for babies.

There are some statutory regulations in Ireland relating to the Code and while the current EU legislation does not mirror the WHO Code it does intend to conform to the principles and aims of the code. The legislation does not completely eliminate inappropriate marketing practices.

It is well recognised globally that there is a negative effect on breastfeeding rates and maternal health when breast milk substitutes are marketed inappropriately.

The HSE has significant concerns relating to the current television, print and online marketing of follow on milks in particular in Ireland to pregnant women and new parents. Advertising of these products which not recommended by the HSE or DOH is undermining the supportive breastfeeding work of the DOH, HSE, Safefood and other stakeholders.

The HSE is committed to the promotion, support and protection of breastfeeding and supporting the provision of evidence based information to all parents regardless of feeding method. A HSE wide policy has been recently developed to promote and protect breastfeeding by eliminating marketing practices in HSE

facilities, by HSE employees, including Section 38 agencies and their employees. This policy will extend the reach of protections in the marketing of breast milk substitutes to all public health services.

Every maternity hospital/unit is working on implementing the HSE's Infant feeding policy for maternity and neonatal services, including the WHO's Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding. Each hospital monitors practices relating to the code in striving to comply with the WHO's Ten Steps and addresses any breaches in unethical marketing of breast milk substitutes within its services.

I trust this clarification will be of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Kelleher', with a horizontal line underneath.

DR. KEVIN KELLEHER, FFPHM, FFPHMI
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