



Emily Wilson

Editor, New Scientist

Email correspondence: February 1st 2021

Dear Ms Wilson

The UK Baby Feeding Law Group works with its 28 member organisations to protect infant, young child and maternal health by ending marketing practices which commercialise infant feeding and mislead consumers. We are writing in response to an article in the New Scientist by Clare Wilson on 27th January 2021. The article is titled "*An unscientific debate over breast milk is spiralling into food banks*". Its subtitle states: "*An overzealous push for breastfeeding is affecting availability of baby formula in food banks*".

These titles misrepresent the issue and have the potential to damage infant and maternal health if followed. The protection and promotion of breastfeeding is not the primary factor informing current UK guidance on the provision of infant formula in food banks, which was written by the Unicef-UK Baby Friendly Initiative, a member of the BFLG-UK, and which can be read here: [Provision of formula milk at food banks - Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative](#).

At its core, the guidance intends to safeguard the health of vulnerable babies. It recommends that local authorities are responsible for and should offer a clear pathway for the distribution of infant formula and that food banks refer families to statutory services, including health visiting and social services, if they are concerned that babies are in danger of not being fed. This was explained recently in an article in the British Medical Journal which can be read here: <https://www.bmj.com/content/bmj/371/bmj.m4449.full.pdf>

The author of your comment piece asserts that "*The resistance to providing formula milk stems from a long-running dispute over infant feeding...but many of the claims about the benefits that breastfeeding can lead to in later life.. may not be true*". Again, this distorts the key reasons why current guidance discourages the distribution of formula through food banks. And whilst actually irrelevant to the issue in hand, it also fails to reference more up to date, robust evidence on the benefits of breastfeeding, such as the prevention of overweight in childhood e.g. Victora et al 2016

Baby Feeding Law Group UK Members:

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers (ABM), Association for Improvements in the Maternity Services (AIMS), Baby Milk Action, Best Beginnings, Breastfeeding Network (BfN), Community Practitioners and Health Visitors Association (CPHVA), Doula UK, The Fatherhood Institute, First Steps Nutrition Trust, GP Infant Feeding Network (GPIFN), HENRY, Hospital Infant Feeding Network (HIFN), Human Milk Foundation, Institute of Health Visiting, Lactation Consultants GB (LCGB), La Leche League GB (LLLGB), Leicester Mammias, Local Infant Feeding Information Board (LIFIB), Midwives Information and Resource Service (MIDIRS), National Breastfeeding Helpline, NCT, Royal College of Midwives (RCM), Save the Children, UK Association of Milk Banking (UKAMB), Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative, Unison, Women's Environmental Network (WEN), and World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative.

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([Breastfeeding in the 21st century: epidemiology, mechanisms, and lifelong effect - The Lancet](#)) and Rito et al 2019 (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31030194/>).

The implication that the Unicef-UK Baby Friendly Initiative guidelines state that people asking for formula should be told to breastfeed is incorrect. Not everyone can or wants to breastfeed, and that is why those families seeking help to feed their babies in the first year of life need the support of trained professionals who can ensure access to a sustainable supply of safe and appropriate infant formula if needed.

We are disappointed to see such poor quality, uninformed and biased journalism that only serves to undermine evidence-based public health messaging about infant feeding. This is particularly damaging given the current pandemic and deep concerns about widening health inequalities facing our youngest and most vulnerable members of society. We urge you to print a clarification that provides a link to and accurately outlines the content and rationale for the current guidance on the provision of formula at food banks.

Yours sincerely

V.Sibson

Dr Victoria Sibson

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