



**January 18, 2010**  
**For immediate release**

**STARTS/**

**WHEN SHOULD BABIES START SOLIDS?**

La Leche League New Zealand (LLLNZ) is concerned that a review published in the *British Medical Journal* (1) undermines the progress that has been made in improving infant health over the past decade. The review questions the World Health Organisation's (WHO) global recommendation of exclusive breastfeeding to six months. The controversy has caused confusion for parents regarding when to introduce complementary foods.

La Leche League encourages mothers to watch for cues from their babies which indicate readiness to start solids. La Leche League says this is usually around the middle of their first year, and mothers are encouraged to continue breastfeeding. Early introduction of complementary foods can compromise an infant's developing immune system, affect digestive and neurological development, and impact on a mother's milk supply and her return to fertility. Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life has been demonstrated to reduce respiratory and gastrointestinal infectious disease, childhood obesity, optimise brain and neurological development, and to reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, breast cancer and heart disease in later life. (2,3,4,5,6,7)

LLLNZ Director, Alison Stanton says "It is relevant to note that this is a review of existing studies selected by the authors, three of whom have received funding from infant formula or baby food industries in the last few years. It is not new research and the conflicts of interest detract from this review."

La Leche League supports the WHO global recommendations on infant feeding. WHO stands by its global recommendations that *infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. Thereafter, to meet their evolving nutritional requirements, infants should receive nutritionally adequate and safe complementary foods while breastfeeding continues for up to two years of age or beyond*, as being best for babies worldwide. In response to the British review Christy Feig from WHO has pointed out that they closely follow new research findings and have a process for periodically re-examining recommendations. Systematic reviews accompanied by an assessment of the quality

of evidence are used to review guidelines to ensure that the recommendations are based on the best available evidence and free from conflicts of interest. (8)

Alison Stanton says, “La Leche League New Zealand remains interested in future new research relating to the healthy development of babies. And we will continue to encourage mothers to be the experts on their own babies and respond to their cues.”

1. <http://www.bmj.com/content/342/bmj.c5955.full>
2. Rebhan B, Kohlhuber M, Schwegler U, Fromme H, Abou-Dakn, Koletzko BV. Breastfeeding duration and exclusivity associated with infants' health and growth: data from a prospective cohort study in Bavaria, Germany. *Acta Paediatr*2009;98:974-80.
3. Quigley MA, Kelly YJ, Sacker A. Breastfeeding and hospitalization for diarrheal and respiratory infection in the United Kingdom Millennium Cohort Study. *Pediatrics*2007;119:e837-42.
4. Ivarsson, A., Hernell, O., Stenlund, H., & Persson, L. A. (2002). Breast-feeding protects against celiac disease. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 75, 914-921.
5. Rutstein, S.O. 2005. Effects of preceding birth intervals on neonatal, infant and under-five years mortality and nutritional status in developing countries: Evidence from the Demographic and Health Surveys. *International Journal of Gynaecology and Obstetrics* 89(suppl 1): S7-S24.
6. Klerman LV, Cliver SZ, Goldenberg RL. The impact of short interpregnancy intervals on pregnancy outcomes in a low-income population. *American Journal of Public Health*1998;88(8):1182-1185.
7. MCNEILLY, A.S. Neuroendocrine changes and fertility in breastfeeding women. *Progress in Brain Research* 133: 207-214. 2001
8. [www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2011/breastfeeding\\_20110115/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2011/breastfeeding_20110115/en/index.html)

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La Leche League is an international non-governmental not-for-profit non-sectarian organisation whose mission is to help mothers to breastfeed through mother-to-mother support, encouragement, information and education; and to promote a better understanding of breastfeeding as an important element in the healthy development of the baby and mother. There are 55 groups across New Zealand with 150 accredited Leaders supporting thousands of women every year. [www.lalecheleague.org.nz](http://www.lalecheleague.org.nz)

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