



Letter to Health Care Institution

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Dear [Health Care Institution – CEO, department head or other responsible person],

As a regular client of your health care services, I have become aware that gift packs containing infant formula are being distributed to expectant and new mothers visiting your clinic/facility.

The distribution of free samples, coupons and promotional pamphlets from formula companies are prohibited under the terms of the World Health Organization's International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and relevant World Health Assembly Resolutions which Canada has endorsed. Specifically,

“No facility of a health care system should be used for the purpose of promoting infant formula or other products within the scope of this Code. ...” Article 6.2

The aim of the International Code is to remove commercial pressure to formula feed and to protect against the distribution of biased information to pregnant women and new mothers.

This is not a trivial issue of maternal choice. Formula fed babies are at increased risk of childhood cancer, asthma, ear and respiratory infections, allergies, diabetes and gastrointestinal infections. Formula fed babies also score lower on intelligence and vocabulary tests than their breastfed counterparts. As formula fed babies grow into adults, they are at greater risk for cardiovascular disease and obesity. For the mother, not breastfeeding means higher risk of breast, ovarian and other cancers.

It is because of these health risks as well as the increased risk of death during the postneonatal period (a recent study notes 21 per cent higher postneonatal mortality for formula fed infants in the US) that compliance to the International Code is important. I am quite sure that you want to meet your obligations to comply with the Code and support mothers to do what's best for their babies by helping to create an environment that encourages breastfeeding.

I am sure that your health facility (practice) will want to do the best for mothers and babies. I look forward to seeing a breastfeeding-friendly policy implemented in your facility (practice) and an end to the practice of distributing free formula samples, coupons or literature from formula companies that undermine breastfeeding.

Sincerely,

(Your name)

cc: Hon. Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of Health
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