

**GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
SOCIAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT**

Block - D, 1st Floor, Dispur

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No.SWD.229/2013/150

Dated Dispur, the 17th August, 2020

From: Shri Mukesh C. Sahu, IAS
Commissioner and Secretary to the Govt of Assam
Social Welfare Department

To: The Principal Secretary, BTC, KAAC & NCHAC
The Deputy Commissioner (All)
District Social Welfare Officer (All)

Sub: Continuity of essential nutrition services in context of COVID-19

Sir/ Madam,

In continuation of this department's letter No.SWD.229/2013/147 dated 28th May, 2020, a dipstick study on continuity of essential nutrition services was conducted randomly in all districts by the State Nutrition and Community Action Resource (CARE) Centre, Tezpur University during the month of June, 2020. The findings have highlighted the good practices as well as gaps in delivery of certain services across the State. In this context, the findings of the study are as follows:

Growth monitoring

- The study has shown that nearly 59% of AWWs reported that growth monitoring was conducted by them during May, 2020 through door to door visits during VHSND and Immunisation days
- weight-for-age assessment was completed for less than 45% under-five children, and only about 35% under-five children were screened for Severe Acute Malnutrition (weight-for height) during this period

IFA Supplementation among children and adolescent girls

- Only 22% AWWs are aware of the advisory on revised strategy of IFA supplementation i.e. delivery of IFA supplements to adolescent girls through home visits. Similarly, only 40% supervisors, 53% CDPOs and 48% DSWOs are aware of this.
- Less than 10% AWWs reported continuing to deliver IFA tablets to adolescent girls through home visits.

Counseling and messaging on optimal nutrition behaviour for children, adolescents and women

- While 80% AWWs reported counselling during THR visits, it was limited only to COVID-19 precautions and only 10% AWWs conveyed any nutrition messages beyond COVID-19 messages.

Having regard to the above, you are requested to take remedial steps to ensure continuity of essential nutrition services such as growth monitoring and screening for malnutrition; Iron Folic Acid (IFA) supplementation; and counselling on nutrition behaviour. For your convenience, the detailed steps required to be taken are enunciated below:

To promote growth monitoring

- Continue regular growth monitoring and screening for SAM for all under-five children for timely identification and care provision for children with malnutrition.
- Monthly weight-for-age and weight-for-height measurements for all children and appropriate reporting into ICDS-CAS/MPR. After every use of anthropometric equipment, they should be sanitized before next use.
- All children identified as severely underweight should be provided additional THR as per the norms. In addition, children with Severe Acute Malnutrition Should be referred to health facility/NRC.

Continuity of IFA supplementation among children and adolescent girls

- Ensure that AWWs continue to deliver IFA tablets to all adolescent girls through home visits. In case of shortage of supply, they should get it from the nearest sub-centre to continue supplementation.

Counselling activities

- Ensure AWWs promote optimal nutrition behaviours among community. Various platforms including THR distribution visits, other home visits, VHND/RI, and fortnightly telephonic calls should be used by AWWs to spread the messages.

The key messages for orientation of different target groups are outlined below for reference.

(a) Messages for adolescent girls

- The adolescent girl should consume one blue IFA tablet every week. Avoid tea/coffee as it inhibits iron absorption. Tablet should be consumed after 1 hour of meal.
- Emphasize on colourful balanced diet prepared using locally available resources.
- Increase intake of Iron-rich food, vitamin C rich-foods and diverse diet to enhance iron absorption and boost Immunity.

(b) Messages for Pregnant women

- Consume at least three main meals and 1-2 nutritious snacks daily. Meals must comprise items from energy giving foods (cereals, fats and sugar), body building (pulses and legumes, nuts, milk and milk products, eggs, meat, fish and poultry) and protective foods (vegetables and fruits) Continue daily dose of micronutrient supplements (iron folic acid and calcium).
- Remember breastfeeding is very essential for newborns as breast milk helps to strengthen immune system of baby and protects against infectious diseases. Breastfeeding should begin in the first hour after birth.

(c) Messages for lactating mothers

- Exclusive breastfeeding for first six months of life, and then adequate and safe complementary food should be given from 6 months of age onwards, along with breastfeeding

- A mother with any of the symptoms of corona virus (fever, cough, shortness of breath) who is breastfeeding or having skin-to-skin contact with her child should continue to breastfeed while taking precautions such as: (i) use mask when near the child; (ii) cover nose and mouth with handkerchief while sneezing and coughing; (iii) wash hands for at least 40 seconds after coughing or sneezing, before and after contact with the child; (iv) routinely clean/ disinfect any surface she has touched by cleaning with soap or alcohol based sanitizer.

(d) Messages for mothers/ caregivers of children 6m to 2yrs:

- Introduce adequate and safe complementary food after baby turns 6 months old. In the first six months of life, most of the nutrition needs of child are met by breastmilk. Once the child is six months old, child requires a variety of nutritious complementary foods along with breast milk
- Child's diet should be diverse, nutrient-rich and hygienically prepared at home and he/she should be frequently fed along with breastmilk for their growth, for the development of their brain, for getting energy and for fighting against infections
- There are seven different food groups like (i) Cereals; (ii) pulses, (iii) vitamin A rich foods (yellow coloured fruits and vegetables); (iv) other fruits and vegetables; (v) eggs; (vi) meat, fish poultry; and (vii) milk and milk products. Children (6-23months) should be fed a diverse diet using locally available and acceptable resources consisting of at least four food groups per day.

In this context, your personal intervention is requested so that despite the hurdles created by the ongoing pandemic, continuity of essential nutrition services to the target group is maintained. To this end, the field level functionaries of Social Welfare Department may be sensitized accordingly.

Yours faithfully,


 ✓ Commissioner & Secretary
 Social Welfare Department


Memo No. SWD.229/2013/150-A

Dispur, the 17th August, 2020

Copy to: -

1. The Director of Social Welfare, Assam, Uzanbazar, Guwahati for information and necessary action
2. The PS to the Minister, Social Welfare Department for kind appraisal of the Hon'ble Minister
3. Dr. Shweta Sharma, Nutrition Specialist, UNICEF, Office for Assam, Beltola, Guwahati with a request for handholding support in the districts where UNICEF has presence.

By order, etc.


 Commissioner & Secretary
 Social Welfare Department