

Guidance note on 'Animal milk as an option for newborn and infant feeding in case of non-availability of own mother's breastmilk and donor human milk especially during the COVID pandemic'

Mother's milk either in the form of breastfeeding or expressed breast milk feeding is recommended as the best feeding option for newborn and infant less than 6 months of age. If mother's own milk is not available, Donor Human Milk (DHM) is the next best option. However, DHM is not widely available across the country presently. Therefore, in unavoidable circumstances such as sickness or death of the mother, when mother's own milk or DHM is not available, animal milk feeding may be considered as the next feeding option as it is easily available, economical and culturally acceptable.

It is important to remember that the immune factors and growth factors present in the breast milk are not present in animal milk. Therefore, animal milk should be considered as a stop-gap measure only and all efforts must be made to establish re-lactation at the earliest.

Many developing countries are advocating animal milk as an alternative feeding option for newborns and infants less than 6 months, when mother's own milk or DHM is not available. In Middle and Low-income countries, about 10% infants below 6 months of age receive animal milk feeding. Therefore, animal milk can be included as a replacement feeding option for a temporary purpose.

Amongst animal milk, cow and buffalo milk are the commonest. It is widely available in the form of raw milk and pasteurized milk. Traditionally animal milk is fed after boiling which helps in digestion and decreasing the risk of allergy.

As far as animal milk is concerned, it is recommended that undiluted locally available animal milk be used. It is important to note that locally available animal milk must be fresh and boiled animal milk, or pre-packed, pasteurized toned milk/pasteurized cow's milk (containing 3% fat, 3.1% protein and providing 58 Kcal/100ml).

Animal milk is not ideally suited to meet the complete nutritional requirements of an infant below 6 months, therefore, infants receiving animal milk should additionally, receive multivitamin and iron supplementation. It is recommended to provide multivitamins as per RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance) and iron supplementation (2 mg/kg of elemental iron) after 6 weeks of age if they are predominantly animal milk fed.

Animal milk should not be diluted as, there is always risk of over dilution and also more risk of infections. Therefore, it is important that mothers should be advised to give 15-20 ml (3-4 tea spoonful) of safe drinking water in between feeds to decrease renal solute load.

A baby needs an average of 60 ml of milk/kg body weight on day 1 with a daily increment of 20ml/kg/day reaching to 150ml/kg /day by first week of age. This is divided into 6-8 feeds according to the baby's age.

It is important that animal milk is given with a cup/paladai/spoon, which is easier to clean and will be important to transit from animal milk feeding to breastfeeding whenever mother is willing and able to do so. Bottle must not be used as this increases the risk of diarrhea and other morbidities.