

natural resources. However, like most of the world's natural resources, breastmilk has been contaminated by chemical pollution. But even where breastmilk contamination is highest, the overall health risks associated with artificial feeding are higher. Those concerned about toxins should keep in mind that heavy metals such as lead, aluminum, cadmium and mercury, chemical residues from pesticides and fertilizers, and hormone-disrupting plasticizers have all been found in formula. In addition, recalls of infant formula from the market are regularly made because of industrial and bacterial contamination.

To protect this valuable resource, we must support the global movement to reduce the use of pesticides and other persistent organic pollutants (POPs) through initiatives like the UN Stockholm Convention on POPs and the ILO Convention 184 on Health and Safety in Agriculture.

HIV/AIDS

The global HIV/AIDS pandemic is one of the most difficult challenges to the promotion of optimal infant feeding practices. In response, there are some workable initiatives such as an increase in milk banks to provide for the infants of HIV positive mothers. In addition, some research suggests that exclusive breastfeeding can reduce the risk of transmission to the level artificially fed infants are exposed to.

A WHO review* suggests that in some HIV high-risk environments, the risk of dying from infectious diseases in the first two months of life is six times greater for infants who are not breastfed. Such infants are up to 14 times more likely to die from diarrhoea and three times more likely to die from acute respiratory infections than children who are exclusively breastfed. The promotion of infant formula feeding to reduce HIV infection in these environments may increase overall infant morbidity, mortality and malnutrition.

* WHO Collaborative Study Team on the Role of Breastfeeding in the Prevention of Infant Mortality. Effect of breastfeeding on infant and child mortality due to infectious diseases in less developed countries: a pooled analysis. Lancet 2000; 355:451-55

Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs)

Bottle-fed babies could be undernourished if given genetically modified infant formula milk because of inadequate regulations and testing regimes for GE foods.

The Royal Society Working Group on Genetically Modified Food of the United Kingdom

Lax labelling laws in many countries allow companies to include GMOs in formula and other infant foods without the knowledge of the consumer. Inserted genes can disrupt a plant's natural growth and development or function differently than expected. As a result, genetically engineered foods can have unintended effects, with potentially harmful consequences for human health. Along with the toxins and allergens that can be transferred from one organism to another, there is concern about the possibility of antibiotic resistance developing through the use of GMOs and the fear that genetic engineering can decrease a food's nutritional value. Infant foods should be kept GMO-free because of these associated risks. Is it right that we experiment with these modified foods on human infants before fully knowing the consequences?

What are the Opportunities ?



Improved global communication offers opportunities for worldwide dialogue, networking and action. In this new millennium, we need to use these available mechanisms to bring people together and find ways to address the challenges of globalisation while creating viable solutions. Working together, members of the global

breastfeeding movement can have a positive impact – both internationally and within local communities – on the structures and individuals that influence and enable women to breastfeed and to provide optimal care for their children. Some ideas for action include:

- Increase worldwide cooperation among members of the breastfeeding movement to address common problems and issues.
- Stress the importance of breastfeeding among civil society organisations working toward peace and justice.
- Use access to efficient, low-cost communication tools to link with people across the globe working to promote and protect breastfeeding.



- In the face of the HIV epidemic, groups can insist on independent research to provide accurate information to mothers facing infant feeding decisions.

- Use global networks to persuade governments to establish sound policies that regulate and control the marketing and labelling of infant feeding products.

