Association of British Paediatric Nurses
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Committed to promoting the development of children's nursing through evidence based information about practice and education

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World Breastfeeding Week 1st-7th August 2026 – Supporting families to give every child the best start in life

Every year, World Breastfeeding Week provides an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of breastfeeding and the vital role healthcare professionals play in supporting families. The Association of British Paediatric Nurses (ABPN) recognises the contribution of professionals working across both acute and community services to help babies, children and families achieve the best possible start in life.

The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, followed by continued breastfeeding alongside appropriate complementary foods for up to two years and beyond[1]. Breastfeeding is widely recognised as one of the most effective public health interventions for improving infant and maternal health outcomes.

Breast milk provides optimal nutrition while also supporting the development of the infant immune system. Often described as a baby's first vaccine, it contains antibodies and protective factors that help reduce the risk of infection and illness during early childhood[2].

The benefits extend beyond infancy. Breastfeeding is associated with improved maternal health outcomes, supports parent-infant attachment and can contribute to improved emotional wellbeing and confidence during the early stages of parenthood.

Supporting families wherever they receive care

While breastfeeding is natural, it is not always easy. Many mothers experience challenges relating to positioning and attachment, milk supply, pain, conflicting advice or lack of support.

Access to skilled, timely and compassionate support can make a significant difference to both breastfeeding experiences and outcomes.

[1] World Health Organization (WHO). *Infant and Young Child Feeding Guidelines*.
[2] See https://www.who.int/health-topics/breastfeeding#tab=tab_1

Across maternity services, neonatal units, children's services, health visiting teams and community services, healthcare professionals play an essential role in empowering families with evidence-based information and practical support.

Programmes such as the UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative[3] continue to promote high standards of care and support for infant feeding across both hospital and community settings, with many health care providers having breastfeeding champions in place to promote breastfeeding.

As healthcare increasingly focuses on prevention, reducing health inequalities and delivering care closer to home, breastfeeding support remains an important investment in the health and wellbeing of babies, mothers and communities. Government investment through Start for Life[4] services continues to recognise the importance of infant feeding support, including breastfeeding advice and early intervention for families[5,6]

Breastfeeding, health inequalities and prevention

Breastfeeding support can be particularly important for families facing financial hardship and wider health inequalities.

For many families living on limited incomes, breastfeeding offered not only significant financial benefits but also confidence, empowerment and reassurance that they were providing the best possible nutrition for their baby.

Breastfeeding can also contribute to reduced healthcare costs through lower rates of childhood illness and reduced demand for healthcare services. In addition, it is an environmentally sustainable form of infant feeding, requiring no manufacturing, transportation or packaging.

Healthcare professionals have a vital role in ensuring that all families, regardless of their circumstances, have access to accurate information, compassionate support and the resources needed to make informed infant feeding decisions.

The Association of British Paediatric Nurses calls on Government and health leaders to:

- Continue investing in breastfeeding support across acute and community services.
- Ensure equitable access to evidence-based infant feeding support for all families.
- Protect and strengthen Baby Friendly standards across healthcare settings.
- Promote joined-up pathways between hospital and community services to provide consistent support throughout the infant feeding journey.

[3] UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative.

[4] NHS Start for Life

[5] Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme Guidance. [abpn-uk.com]

[6] UK Government – *Families to Receive £126 Million in Early Years Support*. [starlight.org.uk]

Jessica Semedo, Roald Dahl Transition Nurse Specialist and Association of British Paediatric Nurses member says:

"Breastfeeding is about far more than nutrition alone. It supports health, attachment, emotional wellbeing and family relationships.

During my time supporting mothers in community services, I saw how access to timely information, encouragement and practical support could make a real difference to a family's confidence and experience. For many families facing financial challenges, breastfeeding also provided reassurance that they were able to give their baby the best possible start in life while reducing additional financial pressures.

Every parent deserves the opportunity to make informed choices and receive compassionate, evidence-based support, regardless of where they live or their circumstances. Whether that support is provided in maternity services, neonatal care, children's services or community settings, every interaction matters.

World Breastfeeding Week reminds us that helping families achieve the best possible start in life is a shared responsibility across the whole healthcare system."

Notes for editors

- World Breastfeeding Week takes place annually from 1–7 August.
- The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life and continued breastfeeding alongside complementary feeding up to two years and beyond.
- UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative supports maternity, neonatal, community and children's services to improve infant feeding care and parent-infant relationships.
- Start for Life services provide infant feeding support and early intervention for families across England[7,8].
- The Association of British Paediatric Nurses is the oldest children's nursing association in the world, established in 1938, with members spanning clinical practice, education, leadership and research.

Sources of support

- The Breastfeeding Network.
- National Breastfeeding Helpline.
- Global Health Media Project.
- UNICEF UK – Responsive Feeding Guidance.
- Bliss - https://www.bliss.org.uk/

[7] Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme Guidance. [abpn-uk.com]

[8] UK Government – *Families to Receive £126 Million in Early Years Support*. [starlight.org.uk]