WHO Code of Marketing

The aim of the WHO Code is "to contribute to the provision of safe and adequate nutrition for infants, by the protection and promotion of breastfeeding, and by ensuring the proper use of breast milk substitutes, when these are necessary, on the basis of adequate information and through appropriate marketing and distribution."

The Code was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 1981 as a recommendation to all its Member States, and Nestlé was the first company to announce (in 1982) that it would voluntarily implement the WHO Code in all developing countries. As a result, Nestlé accepts no advertising or marketing to the public of any kind, and no contact between infant milk marketing staff and the public in those countries.

Nestlé has repeatedly taken action in countries to promote adoption of the WHO Code by governments, and government-sponsored monitoring of the entire industry.

WHO Code implementation and assurance

Nestlé has a three-part method to assure compliance with the WHO Code:

- Nestlé has an extensive ISO-like internal monitoring system, the WHO Code Quality Assurance System, which is now active in all developing countries.
- Nestlé’s international auditors conduct an extensive audit of compliance with the WHO Code in 9-20 countries annually.
- Nestlé has a system of ongoing, independent audits by external social auditing companies.

Results of the most recent of these external audits, carried out in Sri Lanka, can be accessed from Nestlé Baby Milk website.

In addition, there is a Nestlé internal ombudsman system for any employee who wishes to confidentially report alleged WHO Code violations.

Nestlé learned a great deal from its experience concerning infant formula marketing in Africa, recognising our responsibility to go beyond what were accepted marketing standards at the time. We integrated the WHO Code across our entire operations in developing countries in 1982, and continue to monitor its application, refining our instructions with experience. We work with governments, others in industry and members of civil society to develop the Code in countries where it is applied.

‘The Infant Food Industry and the WHO Code’, published by analysts GES Investment Services, assessed infant food companies’ implementation of the Code and rated Nestlé as the top company in Code application, stating: "Nestlé has the most elaborate policies and mechanisms to address the Code, distinctly ahead of its peers."

The full wording of our Infant Formula Policy is available online at Nestlé Baby Milk website where we also answer the most commonly asked questions about infant feeding. We welcome feedback, and we continue to monitor our approach and communicate openly with all stakeholders.
**Infant formula marketing, Malaysia**

In 2006, the Malaysian government imposed sanctions on eight out of the 12 infant food companies operating in the country for violations of the Malaysian Health Ministry’s Infant Formula Code of Ethics. Nestlé was the only non-Asian company not at fault.

The eight multinational manufacturers of infant milk formula were banned from advertising, selling or producing in Malaysia for a year by the country’s Health Minister, Datuk Dr Chua Soi Lek. The action was a direct response to earlier violations of the Health Ministry’s Infant Formula Code of Ethics, drawn up in line with the World Health Organization’s International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes.

Of the four remaining companies not to be penalised, Nestlé - a strict adherent to the WHO International Code across its worldwide operations - was the only non-Asian company deemed to be operating within Malaysia’s infant formula marketing guidelines.

Dr Chua stated that fines didn’t seem to be a suitable deterrent, and promised to disclose company names in the press unless they took steps to redress their offences. These included:

- promoting and advertising without approval from the Ministry
- giving incentives to traders to market powdered milk
- giving samples directly to breast-feeding mothers
- acquiring the contact details of pregnant women with a view to targeting them as potential customers using events organised by medical practitioners to suggest their products were endorsed by health professionals.