

WHO urges immediate skin to skin contact for babies born prematurely

May 2023. WHO has launched new guidelines to improve survival and health outcomes for babies born early (before 37 weeks of pregnancy) or small (under 2.5kg at birth). The guidelines advise that skin to skin contact with a caregiver should start immediately after birth.

This marks a significant change from earlier guidance and common clinical practice, reflecting the immense health benefits of ensuring caregivers and their preterm babies can stay close, without being separated, after birth.

“Preterm babies can survive, thrive, and change the world – but each baby must be given that chance,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “These guidelines show that improving outcomes for these tiny babies is not always about providing the most high-tech solutions, but rather ensuring access to essential healthcare that is centred around the needs of families.”

The guidelines also strongly recommend breastfeeding to improve health outcomes for premature and low birthweight babies, because it reduces infection risks when compared to infant formula. Donor milk is the next best alternative, if mother’s milk is not available, though fortified “preterm formula” may be used if donor milk banks are not accessible.

Reference:

- WHO Global Position Paper and Implementation Strategy on kangaroo mother care call for fundamental reorganisation of maternal–infant care. Gary L Darmstadt et al. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(23\)01000-0/fulltext?dgcid=raven_jbs_etoc_email](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(23)01000-0/fulltext?dgcid=raven_jbs_etoc_email). DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)01000-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)01000-0) and https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/11/1130602?utm_source=UN+News+-+Newsletter&utm_campaign=a057370b0c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2022_11_16_01_00&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_fdbf1af606-a057370b0c-107573841
- Global position paper. Kangaroo mother care: a transformative innovation in health care. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/367626/9789240072657-eng.pdf>
- Kangaroo mother care: implementation strategy for scale-up adaptable to different country contexts. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/367625/9789240071636-eng.pdf>