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Breastfeeding: UNICEF Campaign

Thank you for contacting me about infant feeding.

I recognise that breastfeeding is a personal choice for each woman to make and that not all mothers are able to or choose to breast feed.

It is widely agreed that breastfeeding delivers significant health benefits to new-born babies, and promotes strong bonds between mother and baby. It provides the child with a perfect balance of vitamins and nutrients, and protects mother and baby from infection and disease. That is why, when possible, the Department of Health encourages exclusive breast feeding for the first six months of a child's life.

For those who choose not to breastfeed or who are not able to do so, the Government supports the safe use of infant formula, and I know that regulations are in place to ensure that all types of infant formula meet the nutritional needs of babies.

I understand that breastfeeding rates vary nationally and I believe that it is important that local commissioners offer all new mothers the best quality of care. There are now 2,000 more NHS midwives than in 2010 who can provide women with the advice and support needed to breastfeed.

In 2014, the Government established the National Infant Feeding Network with UNICEF UK, which promotes evidence-based practice on infant feeding and early childhood development to deliver improved outcomes for women and their babies.

In line with UNICEF's "Baby Friendly" guidelines, all women should be supported to make informed decisions and to develop a close relationship with their babies soon after birth. Public Health England is working with local services, midwives and health visitors to make this vision a reality, with a particular focus on areas needing urgent support.

You may be pleased to know that the Government is implementing the recommendations from the Better Birth report, to improve maternity services in England. This includes the promotion of breastfeeding. Public Health England and UNICEF UK commission evidence-based interventions to improve breastfeeding rates.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP