

Infant and young child feeding threshold

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Key points

- Infant and young child feeding (IYCF) should be assessed by regular nutrition surveys following SENS guidelines.
- Key IYCF information should be gathered at reception centres or other entry points.

1. Overview

Infant and young child feeding indicators are employed to monitor the feeding practices of infants and young children aged between 0 and 23 months. Protection and promotion of appropriate infant and young child feeding (IYCF) in emergencies helps to save the lives of the most vulnerable infants and young children, and plays a key role in preventing malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies.

If adequate feeding and caring practices for infants and young children aged less than 24 months are not protected, promoted and supported, and if infant-mother pairs who are having difficulty breastfeeding are not identified and supported, infants and young children may be fed inadequately, increasing the risk of malnutrition and death. Non-breastfed infants younger than 6 months must be identified and given support quickly. Key elements of adequate IYCF practices are:

- Timely initiation of breastfeeding.
- Exclusive breastfeeding for six months.
- Continued breastfeeding to 24 months and beyond.
- Introduction to safe, adequate and appropriate complementary foods at 6 months.

UNHCR recommends use of seven standardised IYCF indicators, through Standardised Expanded Nutrition Surveys (SENS). In emergency situations, the two most essential are 'timely initiation of breastfeeding' and 'exclusive breastfeeding under 6 months'.

2. Main guidance

Emergency standard

The standard below is applied to both emergencies and longer-term situations.

Key infant and young child feeding indicator thresholds in refugee settings

Indicator	Unit	Emergency standard	Post-emergency standard
Timely initiation of breastfeeding	Proportion of children between 0 and 23 months who were put to breast within one hour of birth	≥70%*	≥80%*
Exclusive breastfeeding under 6 months	Proportion of infants between 0 and 5 months who received only breastmilk during the previous day	≥70%*	≥70%*

* Because no standard threshold exists for these indicators, thresholds are based on technical consultations and a review of current refugee populations. They may be adjusted as more evidence is gathered.

Annexes

[UNHCR's policy related to the acceptance, distribution and use of milk products in refugee settings](#)

[UNHCR, IYCF screening questionnaire](#)

3. Links

[UNHCR, Global Strategy for Public Health UNHCR SENS](#)

4. Main contacts

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