

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE**

**RAJYA SABHA
UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 1090
TO BE ANSWERED ON 28TH JULY 2026**

DECLINE IN EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING RATES

**1090 SHRI S NIRANJAN REDDY:
SMT. RAJATHI:**

Will the **Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE** be pleased to state :

- (a) whether Government has taken cognizance of the decline in exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months from 63.7 per cent in NFHS-5 to 55.8 per cent in NFHS-6 despite improvements in institutional deliveries and early initiation of breastfeeding and taken specific measures to address the challenge;
- (b) whether Government has conducted any assessment to understand the reason for the decline and the impact of rising Caesarean deliveries, inadequate postnatal lactation counselling and early return to work on exclusive breastfeeding; and
- (c) the corrective measures taken or proposed to promote exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months, particularly among working mothers and those employed in the informal sector?

**ANSWER
THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY
WELFARE
(SMT. ANUPRIYA PATEL)**

(a) to (c) As per National Family Health Survey 6 (NFHS 6 2023-24), early initiation of breastfeeding within one hour of birth has increased to 50.1% from 41.8% in NFHS-5 (2019-21), and for children under age 6 months currently breastfeeding indicator has shown an increase to 95.6% in NFHS 6 from 95.1% in NFHS 5.

The rate of exclusive breastfeeding for first 6 months is influenced by multiple factors such as socio-cultural practices, which include individual preferences and choices, use of pre-lacteal food and infant milk substitutes, family practices, frequency of breast feeding etc.

To address these challenges and to promote exclusive breastfeeding practices during the first six months across the country including for working mothers and those employed in the

informal sector, various measures have been inbuilt in the National Health Mission (NHM) programmes which are as below.

- **Mother Absolute Affection (MAA) programme:** Government of India implements the Mother Absolute Affection (MAA) programme since 2016, to promote optimal infant and young child feeding practices with an emphasis on protection and support breastfeeding among all lactating women including working mothers and those employed in the informal sector.

The key components of MAA programmes include counselling of pregnant women for early initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding during ANC visits, medical guidance promoting early initiation of breastfeeding within 1 hour of birth at health facilities, lactation support from trained health care providers addressing the common breastfeeding issues and misconceptions, counselling for the continuation of the exclusive breastfeeding practices and avoiding the prelacteal food and infant milk substitutes, capacity building of community health workers to improve optimal and continued breastfeeding practices up to 2 years and beyond, post-natal counselling of mothers, caretakers and family members for exclusive breastfeeding at health facilities and during, VHSNDs, immunization session and Samagra Shishu Bal Swasthya Karyakram (SSBSK) home visits, Mothers' meetings at community level by ASHAs for breastfeeding promotion and celebration of World Breastfeeding Week (WBW) from 1st to 7th August every year across the country to increase engagement and create positive momentum for breastfeeding.

- **Lactation Management Centres:** Comprehensive Lactation Management Centres (CLMC) are established to ensure availability of safe, pasteurized Donor Human Milk for feeding of sick, preterm and low birth weight babies admitted in Neonatal Intensive Care Units and Special Newborn Care Units; and Lactation Management Units (LMU) to provide lactation support to mothers and to facilitate expression of mother's own milk.
- Various training programs, including Daksh, Dakshta, Skilled Birth Attendant (SBA) and Nurse Practitioner Midwifery (NPM) have been instituted to ensure the availability of well-trained human resources, especially in remote areas to promote normal deliveries and to support early and exclusive breastfeeding.
- **Poshan Tracker** is a digital application for near real time monitoring and tracking of all activities in the Anganwadi Centres (AWCs) by the Anganwadi Workers (AWWs) on defined indicators. The application offers counselling videos on key behaviours and

services which help disseminate messages related to birth preparedness, delivery of child, post natal care, breastfeeding and complementary feeding. Regular field level trainings and workshops are conducted for Anganwadi Workers for using Poshan Tracker application

- **Community mobilization and Awareness Advocacy activities** are also organised to educate people on nutritional aspects such as stunting, early initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding and appropriate complementary feeding practices. State and UTs are conducting and reporting regular sensitisation activities under Jan Andolan during Poshan Maah and Poshan Pakhwada celebrated in the months of September and March-April respectively and also regular Community Based Events (CBEs).
- The Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office (DMEO), NITI Aayog in their 'Evaluation Study of CSS Schemes of Health Sector' conducted in September 2025 reported that new mothers received information about exclusive breastfeeding during the postnatal period reflecting effectiveness of postnatal counselling and health education efforts at the facility and community levels. The Government also undertakes regular National/Regional/ State level review meetings, field visits to States/UTs and Common Review Missions (CRMs) to improve the breastfeeding practices.
