

Ho Ching shares breastfeeding story

Temasek CEO relates her own experience at event to mark World Breastfeeding Week

Jamie Ee Wen Wei

Temasek Holdings chief executive Ho Ching was once advised by her doctor to stop breastfeeding a week after childbirth.

She had contracted chicken pox. Despite the preventive measure, her baby got the virus too. The doctor then suggested she restart breastfeeding to pass on the antibodies to the baby through the milk.

"By then, it was a bit late. I couldn't restart breastfeeding no matter how hard I tried."

In hindsight, Ms Ho, 56, said she should have continued breastfeeding as she would have passed the virus to the baby by the time she saw the doctor for chicken pox.

She was relating her experience yesterday at an event to celebrate

World Breastfeeding Week. Organised by the Breastfeeding Mothers' Support Group (BMSG), it was held at the Health Promotion Board.

"Or, alternatively, I should have continued expressing or pumping my milk more diligently so that I could resume my breastfeeding after my recovery," said Ms Ho, the wife of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. They have four children.

"The only consolation I had was that I spent the next week with him sleeping on my chest half-sitting to make it more comfortable for him while he recovered from his chicken pox. So no milk, but skin-to-skin contact was there," she added.

In her speech, she noted that more mums here are choosing to breastfeed and for a longer period.

A survey by research firm The Nielsen Company found that 41 per cent of mothers interviewed last year chose to breastfeed in their babies' first year, up from 30 per cent in a similar survey in 2006.

Those surveyed last year also did so for 4.5 months on average, up



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Ms Ho Ching and Breastfeeding Mothers' Support Group president Angeline Wee-Yew (right) at HPB's HealthZone. More mothers here are breastfeeding and for a longer period, Ms Ho says.

from 3.3 months clocked by mothers interviewed in 2006.

The World Health Organisation recommends that infants be exclusively breastfed for a minimum of six months. Studies show this cuts the mother's risk of developing ovarian cancer, and strengthens a baby's immunity.

Ms Ho said a major challenge for the BMSG is to encourage mothers to continue to breastfeed even after they are back at work. Providing a conducive environment in the workplace could help.

"In the Singapore office of my company, we have a young workforce and every year, we have almost a dozen new babies. We have a private room which nursing mothers can use to express their milk," she said.

At the event yesterday, she also launched a Chinese-edition breastfeeding handbook, as well as a support group – BrestPal@Yew Tee – set up at Yew Tee Community Club. Those interested in joining the group can call 6762-9647.

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