

Approved subject line: Maryland hospitals eliminate formula marketing

For Immediate Release: Oct. 14, 2015

Contact: Kristen Strader, [kstrader@citizen.org](mailto:kstrader@citizen.org), (202) 588-7785

## **Maryland Hospitals Follow WHO Code and Go Bag-Free**

### ***All Maternity Hospitals Eliminate Formula Discharge Bag Distribution***

WASHINGTON, D.C. – In a positive step for new mothers, all Maryland maternity hospitals now are free of infant formula marketing, including company-sponsored discharge bags. Maryland joins Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Delaware in making this transition.

Formula companies such as Abbott, Nestle and Mead-Johnson have distributed samples to hospitals for years. Rather than receiving what can be seen as an indirect endorsement of formula from hospital staff, mothers in all Maryland hospitals now will be provided with encouragement and support free from marketing.

Studies show that mothers who receive formula samples are [less likely](#) to breastfeed exclusively and they do so for shorter periods of time. Breastfeeding is shown to have [significant health benefits](#) for both babies and mothers. Cheri Hoffman, who recently gave birth at Sinai Hospital in Baltimore, feels that her experience was positively impacted by the elimination of formula marketing.

“Having the support and encouragement of the hospital allowed me to feel more confident in my decision to breastfeed. By not having formula samples readily available to me, I was able to push through those discouraging moments in the difficult first few days of nursing and go on to form a healthy, long-lasting breastfeeding relationship with my son,” Hoffman said.

All birthing hospitals in Maryland have eliminated formula discharge bag distribution and are now in compliance with the World Health Organization (WHO) [International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes](#). The Maryland Breastfeeding Coalition, Public Citizen’s Commercial Alert, Ban the Bags, hospital representatives and numerous activist mothers are to thank.

“Eliminating commercial formula bag distribution from birthing hospitals represents a promise to all mothers – breastfeeding and formula-feeding – that the maternity care they receive in a hospital is free from a conflict of interest,” said Marsha Walker, chair of Ban the Bags.

Dr. Dana Silver, pediatrician at Sinai Hospital and vice president of the Maryland Breastfeeding Coalition, has been instrumental in the elimination of formula marketing from Maryland hospitals. In partnership with the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Maryland Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Maryland Breastfeeding Coalition urged hospitals to “Ban the Bags.”

Formula discharge bags send the subtle message to new families that hospitals endorse formula feeding and are recommending one brand in particular. “In short, these bags are providing free advertising for formula companies,” said Silver. “Hospitals that stopped distributing the formula discharge bags reported no backlash from patients.”

Maryland became bag-free with the closure of Laurel Memorial Hospital – the last hospital in Maryland to distribute formula samples.

“The elimination of formula marketing from Maryland hospitals sets an ethical standard for future health care facilities,” said Kristen Strader, campaign coordinator for Public Citizen’s Commercial Alert. “Maryland hospitals are [keeping up with the national trend](#) of going bag-free and are sending a clear message that health care facilities should market health, not generate profits for formula makers.”

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