SQ-LNS INFORMATION BRIEF

UCDAVIS Institute for Global Nutrition

Recommendations on Small-Quantity Lipid-based Nutrient Supplements in the WHO 2023 Guidelines on complementary feeding and child wasting

Advocacy Working Group of the SQ-LNS Task Force

In 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) released two new guideline documents that are of importance for the nutrition of infants and young children: 1) the WHO guideline for complementary feeding of infants and young children 6-23 months of age, and 2) the WHO guideline for the prevention and management of wasting and nutritional oedema (acute malnutrition). Both Guideline Development Groups reviewed the available evidence and concluded that SQ-LNS can be recommended in specific circumstances. The text from the guidelines is shown in the Table.

The first of these guidelines includes seven sets of recommendations on complementary feeding: 1) continued breastfeeding, 2) milks for children fed milks other than breast milk, 3) age of introduction of complementary foods, 4) dietary diversity, 5) unhealthy foods and beverages, 6) nutrient supplements and fortified food products, and 7) responsive feeding. The guidelines emphasize the importance of prioritizing the consumption of a diverse diet of locally available, nutrient-rich complementary foods for the optimal growth and development of young children. They also recognize that in settings where such adequate nutritious foods may not be readily available, accessible or affordable, nutrient supplements and fortified foods can help fill nutrient gaps. SQ-LNS is one of the fortified products included in #6, and the recommendation for use of SQ-LNS was described as context-specific, based on "high-certainty evidence."

In the guideline on wasting, there are two "modules," one module for treatment (which includes multiple Good Practice Statements and Recommendations) and one for prevention (which includes two Good Practice Statements and two Recommendations). The guideline encourages the delivery of a package of preventive interventions through a multisectoral and multisystem approach in settings where wasting and nutritional oedema occur. It also outlines the role of specially formulated foods in the prevention of wasting and nutritional oedema, particularly in areas of or during periods of high food insecurity. Specially formulated foods, specifically SQ-LNS and medium-quantity LNS, are the only interventions for which there is a positive evidence-based recommendation for prevention of wasting, although infant and young child feeding counseling is encouraged in the Good Practice Statements. No recommendation was made for fortified blended foods, food vouchers, or cash transfers because the evidence base was insufficient or did not support an effect on prevention of wasting.

When incorporating SQ-LNS into programs, SQ-LNS should not be considered a stand-alone intervention and should always be accompanied by quality counseling and support for caregivers, and age-appropriate information about recommended breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices. Further, programs providing SQ-LNS for the prevention of undernutrition should ensure that screening and referral for treatment of severe wasting is available for those children who require it.

Individual countries may choose to integrate these new WHO guidelines into their own national policies and programs that aim to improve child nutrition. Work is underway to translate these new guidelines into practical operational guidance for implementation at the local level.

Recommendations related to SQ-LNS in two recent WHO guidelines

Source	Recommendation statement	Remarks
WHO guideline for complementary feeding of infants and young children 6-23 months of age, 2023	#6. "In some contexts where nutrient requirements cannot be met with unfortified foods alone, children 6–23 months of age may benefit from nutrient supplements or fortified food products." c. "Small-quantity lipid-based nutrient supplements (SQ-LNS) may be useful in food insecure populations facing significant nutritional deficiencies (context-specific, high-certainty evidence)."	"[Fortified products] should never be distributed as stand-alone interventions, rather they should always be accompanied by messaging and complementary support to reinforce optimal infant and young child feeding practices." "None of the products are a substitute for a diverse diet consisting of healthy and minimally processed foods."
WHO guideline on the prevention and management of wasting and nutritional oedema (acute malnutrition), 2023	**Prevention of wasting and nutritional oedema:** D3. a) "In areas of or during periods of high food insecurity, in addition to infant and young child feeding counselling, specially formulated foods (SFFs), including medium-quantity lipid-based nutrient supplements (MQ-LNS) or small-quantity lipid-based nutrient supplements (SQ-LNS), may be considered for the prevention of wasting and nutritional oedema for a limited duration for all infants and children 6-23 months of age, while continuing to enable access to adequate home diets for the whole family." b) "In areas of or during periods of high food insecurity, children living in the most vulnerable households should be prioritized for SFF interventions through a targeted approach. However, when targeting is not possible, these SFFs may need to be given to all households through a blanket approach for infants and children 6-23 months of age, while continuing to enable access to adequate home diets for the whole family and providing infant and young child feeding counselling."	"In contexts where wasting and nutritional oedema occur, implementation of these interventions should ideally be through a multisectoral and multisystem approach." "SFFs should be delivered with behaviour change communication and with messaging on infant and young child feeding including breastfeeding and complementary feeding." "Screening and referral for wasting and nutritional oedema should be done alongside delivery of preventive interventions as part of a continuum of care."