

The UNICEF Mother-Infant MUAC Tape Information Sheet

Why the need for this new MUAC tape?

The UNICEF Mother-Infant Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) Tape is a simple yet powerful screening tool that can be used to identify at-risk mothers/caregivers and infants, so that they can be referred to a health worker for further assessment and care. The tape allows for both the mother/caregiver and infant to be screened at the same time – taking a holistic mother-infant approach, as emphasized in the [2023 WHO Guideline on the prevention and management of wasting and nutritional oedema \(acute malnutrition\) in children under 5 years](#).

An additional benefit of this new tape is that it can be used in **nutritional surveys** and **rapid nutritional assessments**. This is important because infants less than 6 months of age and their mothers have often been left out of rapid assessments and surveys and have subsequently been neglected in the planning and implementation of emergency interventions and priority activities.

What is this new MUAC tape?

The Mother-Infant MUAC Tape has been co-created with governments and implementing partners and piloted in 14 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. The tool has been optimized through online and in-person feedback from these pilots. The tape has two sides, one for the infant and one for the mother/caregiver.

Infant side:

- A measurement of **<110mm (<11cm)**, which is in the violet colour zone, identifies an infant 6 weeks to 6 months of age as being at risk of poor growth and development, according to the 2023 WHO recommendations.
- The tape can also be used by qualified/trained health workers to measure **head circumference** (HC) and then compared against the WHO HC-for-age simplified field tables/charts ([WHO child growth standards: head circumference for age](#)) to flag potential neurodevelopmental concerns, which can also indicate that the child is at risk of poor growth and development.



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Mother side:

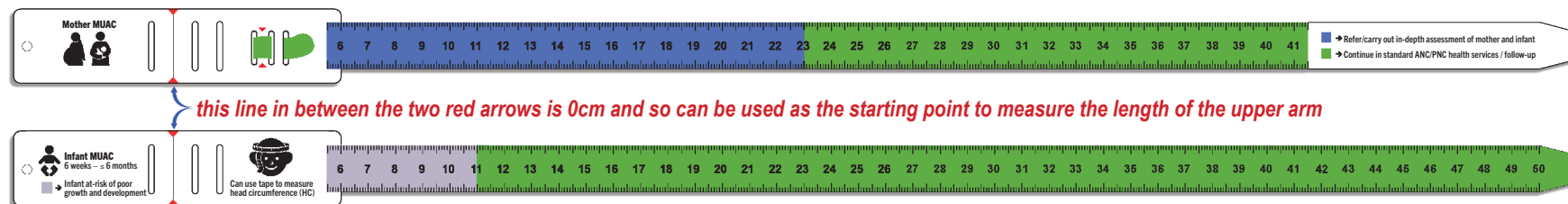
- The tape can be used to identify a non-adolescent pregnant or breastfeeding mother who is undernourished or at risk of undernutrition (in the blue zone). **Note:** *pregnant adolescent girls should be referred for nutritional support regardless of their MUAC.*
- As there is currently no global standard for MUAC cut-offs for pregnant or breastfeeding women, **two tapes are currently in use:** one with a dark blue zone that uses a cut-off of <230mm (<23cm) and one with a light blue zone that uses a cut-off of <210mm (<21cm). These cut-offs represent those most frequently used in national protocols and guidelines.¹

How to start using the new Mother-Infant MUAC Tape

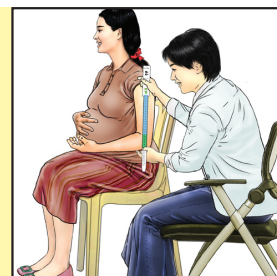
- The new MUAC tape can be ordered directly from the [UNICEF Supply Catalogue](#).
- A [Job Aid](#) to help health workers use the MUAC tape has been developed and is available on the [Global Action Plan on Child Wasting](#) website, as well as via [The Community Infant and Young Child Feeding Counselling Package](#) website (also reproduced below).
- **National protocols and global guidance (including the upcoming UNICEF-WHO implementation guidance on the management of wasting) should be used for follow-up actions when an infant or mother has been identified as at risk.**

¹ UNICEF guidance for humanitarian contexts advises a cut-off of <230mm (<23cm). See: [United Nations Children's Fund, Programme Guidance to Protect the Nutrition of Women and Adolescent Girls in Humanitarian Settings](#), UNICEF, New York, 2024.

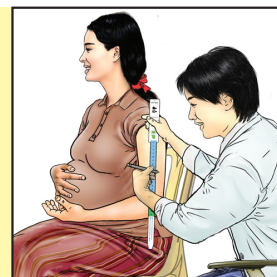
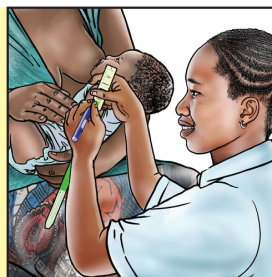
How to use the Mother-Infant MUAC Tape



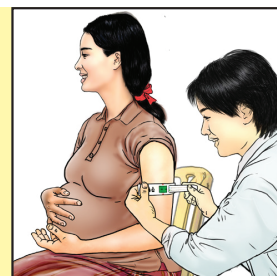
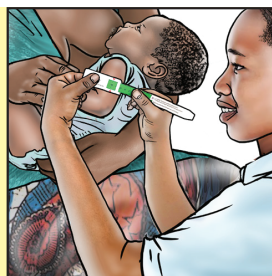
1. Bend the left arm to a 90-degree angle (for infants it can be left or right).
2. Find the tip of the shoulder and the tip of the elbow.
3. Use the MUAC tape to measure the length between these two points.



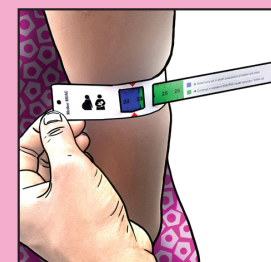
4. Use a pen or your finger to mark the mid-point of the upper arm (don't forget to remove any pen marks when you are finished).
5. Wrap the MUAC tape around the arm over this mid-point.



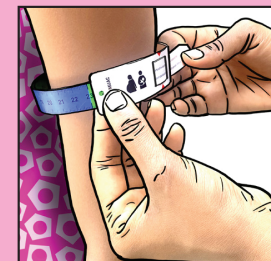
6. Thread the tape through the slits so you can see the numbers and colour between the two small red arrows.
7. Make sure the tape is not too tight or too loose – it should fit snugly with no gaps.
8. Record the measurement and colour you see between the two red arrows, use the line between the red arrows to guide you.



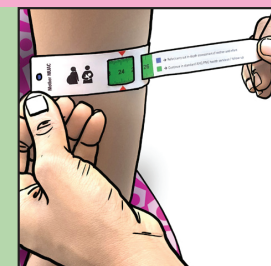
MUAC
tape
is too
tight



MUAC
tape
is too
loose



Correct
tape
tension



REMINDER: Infants 6 weeks to 6 months of age: MUAC <110mm (<11cm) = at risk of poor growth and development (violet colour). Pregnant and breastfeeding women: MUAC cut-off according to national guidelines.

MUAC = mid upper-arm circumference