

DONATIONS CAN BE DANGEROUS

Key Messages To Help With Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies

New mothers and babies are particularly vulnerable and need skilled support for infant feeding

(See news release below)

Editors: Remove the words “infant formula/baby formula” when sharing lists of goods requested for donor drives. Infant formula can be lethal without clean water and proper hygiene.*

The media can play an important role in protecting babies in emergency situations by disseminating information to protect breastfeeding and promote appropriate procurement, use and safer preparation of infant formula. Members of the media can assist by including the following messages in stories:

- Supporting mothers to continue breastfeeding is the best way of protecting infants in emergencies.
- Breastfeeding is not fragile and women who are physically and emotionally stressed are able to make enough milk for their babies.
- Support is available for families with questions about breastfeeding or to aid workers who need guidelines on creating breastfeeding friendly spaces in evacuation centres.
- When needed, infant formula is procured and distributed in a targeted manner along with key supports by governments and aid agencies on the ground
- There are unique concerns with infant formula during an emergency when access to clean water and the ability to heat water may be limited. Common practices are no longer safe. Incorrect preparation of infant formula puts babies at extreme risk.
- Lookalike products that are inappropriate for infants can be easily mistaken by donors, aid workers and parents themselves.
- Emergency workers do not need large amounts of infant formula and any that they do need should be procured locally after families have been assessed for individual needs.
- Skilled support is available for families with questions about infant formula and to aid workers who need guidelines on how to help formula feeding families.

For more information on infant feeding and young child feeding in emergencies, please see

<https://www.enonline.net/ife/iferesourcesoutputs>.

* “... In such environments, babies that are fed infant formula are at high risk of developing infections. They are vulnerable to diarrhoea, which can easily lead to malnutrition, dehydration and death. Respiratory infections, like pneumonia, are also common and often deadly. Infants who cannot be breastfed need to be targeted for special support in emergencies.”

~ [Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies: Information for the Media](#), IFE Core Group, Emergency Nutrition Network

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Flood of well-meaning formula donations puts Ukrainian babies at risk

March 9, 2022 -- SafelyFed Canada reminds donors and relief organizations that donations and untargeted distribution of infant formula and feeding equipment such as bottles and breast pumps put infants and their families at risk.

During this crisis as families are fleeing Ukraine, infants and young children are at increased risk of illness, mostly due to infections that can be reduced by continued breastfeeding. Families who are breastfeeding, even partly, protect their babies and also require fewer resources from emergency services.

Donors should donate cash to organizations providing high-quality services to families with young children. Relief organizations should procure infant formula and related items based on the assessed need of families being served. Ukraine has long been asking for appropriate infant feeding practices for areas impacted by war. A [formal joint statement](#) from the Ukraine Health Ministry and UNICEF and WHO representatives from the region was issued in 2017: "In emergencies, it is very important to reduce the risks related to the existing nutrition practices" and it specifically highlighted that the "desire to help in this situation may lead to an inappropriate transfer or distribution of infant formulas or other milk products."

UNICEF and other aid organizations issued a [joint statement](#) on March 8 2022:

"In accordance with Ukraine regulation1 do not call for, support, accept or distribute donations of Breast Milk Substitutes, including infant formula, other milk products, commercial complementary foods, and feeding equipment (such as bottles, teats, and breast pumps). Required BMS supplies should be purchased (by the caregiver or procured by UNICEF) and provided as part of a sustained package of coordinated care based on assessed need and should be Code-compliant."

Donor human milk should not be sent unless based on an identified need and in coordination with state/local medical authorities or UN agencies coordinated intervention that must include a functional cold chain.. While donations in general are increasingly understood to create problems in disaster response, infant formula and related supplies are especially dangerous.

- Donated products – including formula – are typically based on what the donor has available, even if these are difficult to prepare safely in the circumstances or are inappropriate products that may easily be misused, such as toddler drinks or liquid concentrates
- Donations flood in at the outset in quantities far greater than are needed, consuming critical skilled resources to process and store them safely
- Without appropriate trained supports and coupled with an excess of available donations, parents may overuse these products during the emergency, only to find themselves dependent on them when donations dry up
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What can donors, aid organizations and others involved in the recovery efforts do?

- Don't initiate or share requests for infant formula or feeding equipment donations
- Support efforts to ensure that skilled lactation support, including International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) and other trained helpers are in place to assess and support individual families with their feeding needs
- Create an enabling environment for safe infant feeding, including facility assessments and expert procurement of infant formula and other infant feeding supplies
- Donate cash to organizations that are applying best practices and supporting all families to feed their babies safely

SafelyFed Canada has curated a page of resources to support the needs of families, helpers and humanitarian aid workers:

Contact:

Michelle Pensa Branco MPH IBCLC
SafelyFed Canada, Clinical Lead
T: 416-407-0168 (WhatsApp/Signal/Telegram)
E: michelle@safelyfed.ca

Jodine Chase
SafelyFed Canada, Communications Lead
E: jodine@safelyfed.ca