

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“U.S. formula shortages not mirrored in Canada, as parents express concern”

Reports of infant formula shortages in the United States have raised concerns in Canada. Canadian retailers do not report or anticipate similar shortages, though localized inconsistency in availability may occur, particularly for specialty products affected by a recent Abbott recall. The situation is fluid and may change. Canada has no domestic production of infant formula and is dependent on a handful of manufacturers in the United States.

“Infant formula is often sold as just another food and that’s certainly how the baby food manufacturers market it. Those of us who work in supporting families during emergencies understand that the reality is much different. A baby dependent on infant formula is more food insecure than a breastfed baby, and more vulnerable than any other family member, even when they have ample financial resources,” says Michelle Pensa Branco, co-founder of SafelyFed Canada.

When infant formula is needed, standard infant formulas are interchangeable. Claims such as “gentle” or “easy to digest” are not fact-based and optional additives such as HMOs have no nutritional or health purpose. There is also no basis for warnings to avoid brand changes, though preparation instructions vary by format and brand. Health care workers and those providing support in the early years can alleviate food insecurity of non-breastfed infants by debunking brand loyalty myths and specious health claims by infant formula manufacturers.

Extensively hydrolyzed cow’s milk protein formulas or amino acid based formulas are produced by a small number of manufacturers. These products are intended primarily for infants with cow’s milk protein allergy (CMPA), with a small number of other uses for rare conditions. Parents who are using these products should consult with their baby’s doctor to determine whether these products are needed and suggest alternatives where appropriate or required.

“When we talk about the importance of breastfeeding in an emergency, we’re not thinking about the lifetime reduction in cancer, heart disease and diabetes it confers. Breastfeeding protects against immediate threats to young children, which include not having commercial products available or the facilities in which to safely prepare them. Unfortunately, these risks are poorly understood by parents, in part because Canada continues to allow manufacturers to market these products in misleading ways. We can do better,” she adds.

Key messages:

- Canadian retailers report no significant shortage of infant formula products
- All infant formula (0-12 months) sold in Canada is suitable for infants from birth and brands are interchangeable

- Optional additives, which may vary by brand, do not provide nutritional value and manufacturers are prohibited from making health claims about them
- Infant formula intended for specific conditions, such as a cow's milk protein allergy (CMPA), is not recommended for general use

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