

FEEDING BABIES IN A SHELTERING SITUATION

Infants are a uniquely vulnerable population: they require special protection in sheltering scenarios in order to ensure their short- and long-term well-being.

This handout provides only general guidelines. Contact us or local experts to consult on the specific needs of the population being served and the current circumstances faced.

Ensure that **all** shelter staff and volunteers are instructed to provide a welcoming and warm attitude towards breastfeeding parents. Breastfeeding is the safest way to feed a baby in an emergency and reduces the burden on shelter services as well as the risk to infants.

Canadian law allows breastfeeding anywhere the parent is allowed to be. Parents should be never be asked to move or cover while breastfeeding. Signage will reassure parents and reduce potential for conflicts/complaints.

At arrival, assess all parents of young children and infants for their feeding needs. Record the age of the baby or child, how they were being fed when they were evacuated and how they are being fed now. Changes in feeding are an urgent flag for referral to support and feeding counseling.

Important reminders:

Do not wash bottles or other feeding items in bathrooms. Post signage with instructions.

Hand sanitizer does not kill norovirus or other common viruses that infants are particularly susceptible to. Use proper hand washing with soap and water for diapering and food prep.

Bottled water is not sterile and neither is powdered infant formula.

If you are under a "boil water" advisory, all feeding/pumping equipment should be sterilized after washing. If you are under a "do not consume" advisory, the water must NOT be used for any cleaning or preparation of foods or infant formula.

Cold sanitization with household bleach or commercial tablets may be preferable to reduce reliance on power, fuel and kitchen facilities.

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Some babies will be formula-fed, partly or fully when they arrive. It is your responsibility to ensure a consistent safe supply of food for these babies.

- * Ready-to-feed single serve infant formula (sold in 2-3oz glass or plastic bottles) is the least subject to contamination and requires the fewest resources to serve safely
- * Ready-to-feed in larger containers in the next safest
- * Liquid concentrate is sterile, but needs to be mixed with sterile (boiled) water
- * Powder is not sterile and has to be mixed with very hot water that has been boiled

Only stock formula that is safe for newborns (0+, "from birth"): it is safe for older babies too, but toddler formulas/drinks are NOT safe for young babies.

Most parents who are using formula are used to bottle-feeding.

- * Cup feeding from a disposable cup is the safest, even for the youngest babies
- * If you need to use bottles, disposable bottles and nipples are the next safest
- * Have a mechanism for preventing the reuse of disposable bottles and nipples (i.e: trade one new for one used)
- * If disposable bottles and/or nipples cannot be sourced, sterilize each set before each feeding
- * All bottles and nipples must be washed first with detergent & brush, then sanitized (boiling water or microwave sterilizer or cold sterilization)

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Some mothers pump their milk to feed it to their babies. If they arrive with frozen breastmilk, make every effort to find freezer storage for them.

Human milk is safer than any alternative for infants. While pumped milk takes extra care, it is the next safest way to feed a baby after direct breastfeeding.

- * Provide a safe place for mothers to store their breastmilk
- * Pumped breastmilk can safely stay at room temperature for 6-8 hours
- * Pumping may require a private space with power outlets
- * Pump parts should be washed after each use & sterilized if water is not potable (otherwise every 24 hours)
- * Mothers who are pumping should be encouraged to breastfeed if possible and referred urgently for feeding assistance