

Feeding Infants in a Disaster

Infant Feeding: Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is the safest way to feed babies in emergency situations.

- If your WIC agency is closed, you may contact another one for breastfeeding support. Visit [ncdhhs.gov/localWIC](https://www.ncdhhs.gov/localWIC) for locations and contact information.

In a power outage, frozen breastmilk may thaw. Remember:

- Keeping the freezer door closed will help prevent the milk from thawing completely.
- Milk is still considered frozen if ice crystals can be seen in it.
- Once milk has thawed, use it within 24 hours.
- Thawed milk cannot be refrozen.

You can carry freshly expressed milk in a cooler or an insulated cooler bag with frozen ice packs for up to 24 hours. Once arriving at your destination, you must use the milk right away, store it in the refrigerator or freeze it. If it is not used right away, let emergency responders know that you have expressed breast milk that needs to be refrigerated and stored safely.

To express breast milk during or after an emergency, hand expression or a manual breast pump will allow you to continue without electricity.

Infant Feeding: Formula Feeding

PREPARATION AND STORAGE:

- Ready-to-feed (RTF) formula
 - RTF infant formula is a sterile liquid until opened that is ready to feed without adding water.
 - When using ready-to-feed formula, pour needed amount of formula for one feeding into a clean bottle. After the feeding, throw away any formula left in the baby bottle.
 - Unused RTF infant formula left in the original container must be refrigerated and used within 24 hours or as specified on the formula label.
 - Do not add water to “stretch” the formula.
- Powdered infant formula
 - For standard formulas, similar other brands like the generic or store brand are generally fine.
 - If a baby uses a specialty formula and it is not available, try to work with their health care provider.

- Use a clean bottle or other food-grade safe container and lid to prepare the infant formula.
- If tap water is not safe to drink, use bottled water if available. You may also use boiled water.
- Important note: Powdered infant formula is not sterile. If your baby is less than 2 months old, born prematurely or has a weakened immune system, use ready-to-feed infant formula whenever possible.

REMEMBER:

- Always follow formula label instructions using the scoop provided in each can or those given to you by your health care provider.
- Always use a safe form of drinking water for infant feeding
- Once formula is mixed, it must be refrigerated and used within 24 hours or as written on the formula label. If refrigeration is not available, mix formula each time baby is ready to eat and then throw away any formula left in the bottle after the feeding.
- Use infant formula before the “best by” or “use by” date.
- Infant formula is the recommended formula for those younger than a year, not toddler formula.
- Do NOT give animal milk or plant-based milks to babies instead of infant formula.
- Do NOT make homemade infant formula; it may not have the right amount of nutrients like iron.
- Do NOT water down formula to stretch it out; it can be extremely dangerous to babies.

Cleaning Infant Feeding Items During Emergencies

- Cleaning supplies:
 - In most emergencies, bottled water is safest for cleaning and consuming.
 - Follow advice and instructions from local public health officials about water safety.
 - Clean all tools and containers used for preparing and/or storing baby food, infant formula or breast milk after every use.
- When infant feeding supplies cannot be cleaned:
 - If possible, have baby feed directly at the breast.
 - Use disposable cups and supplies for feeding infants.

Safe Infant Formula Handling and Storage

STORING OPENED INFANT FORMULA:

- The package or container of infant formula must have information on how to store it before and after it is opened. It also must have information on when to throw away prepared formula.
- Follow the manufacturer's directions on the label. Once a container of powdered formula is opened, the formula typically needs to be used within one month. Write the date that you opened the formula on the lid. With the lid tight, store in a cool dry place, not in the refrigerator. Do not freeze.
- Ensure liquid or RTF formula remains at a safe temperature — below 40°F (4°C) but above 32°F (0°C) — to prevent bacterial growth and maintain its texture and nutritional quality.
- “Use By” Date - Don't use a package or container of infant formula after this date. The manufacturer guarantees the nutrient content and quality of the formula only up to the “use by” date. FDA rules require a “use by” date on every container of infant formula.

STORING UNOPENED INFANT FORMULA:

- Store containers in a cool, dry, indoor place — not in vehicles, garages, on the ground or outdoors.
- In case of emergencies that prevent indoor storage, store formula in a cool, dry, insulated container.
- Do not store opened or unopened powder containers in the refrigerator or freezer. Ideal storage temperature range is between 65-75°F. A range between 32-85°F is acceptable.
- Proper storage helps prevent bacterial growth and maintain texture and nutritional quality of the formula.
- Do not use formula from cans that have rust spots or are dented, bulging or damaged.
- Do not use formula if the tamper seal or inner seals of the packaging are open or broken.

FORMULA STORED AT EXTREME TEMPERATURES:

- Freezing is not recommended. It may cause the different parts of the formula to separate and lower the quality of the product.
- Powder stored at cold temperatures may collect moisture and become lumpy and hard to dissolve.

- If powder that was in cold or freezing temperatures looks, smells and mixes normally, it should be safe to use.
- When a liquid product is exposed to extreme temperatures (such as freezing or very hot temperatures), it may separate or get darker.
- Since the temperature where the liquid is being stored and how long it is stored there are important factors, it is impossible to provide specific limits to fit all situations.

Infant Feeding Resources

- CDC's Breastfeeding Resources: cdc.gov/breastfeeding-special-circumstances/about
- CDC How to prepare and store powder infant formula in emergencies: cdc.gov/nutrition/emergencies-infant-feeding/downloads/pages/Prepare-and-Store-Powdered-Infant-Formula-IYCF-E-H.pdf
- FDA Infant Formula: Safety Do's and Don'ts: fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/infant-formula-safety-dos-and-donts
- FDA Safe Storage and Handling: fda.gov/media/178102/download?attachment
- Infant Formula Preparation and Storage: cdc.gov/nutrition/infantandtoddlernutrition/formula-feeding
- NCDHHS Breastfeeding Promotion and Support: ncdhhs.gov/ncbreastfeeding
- USDA WIC Breastfeeding: wicbreastfeeding.fns.usda.gov

WIC Resources

- WIC is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children that provides participants with benefits for healthy foods, breastfeeding education and support, and health care referrals. Learn more at ncdhhs.gov/ncwic.
- Hurricane Helene impacts: Families participating in WIC who may have relocated to a new area can go to any NC WIC agency to have a new eWIC card issued or to request replacement of breastfeeding supplies, breast pumps and food purchased with current WIC benefits and lost due to Hurricane Helene. Call eWIC Customer Service at 1-844-230-0813 or visit ncdhhs.gov/helene.

