

Infant Feeding in an Emergency Situation

Every emergency is different. It may be an earthquake, flood, or power failure. It could also be a personal emergency like an illness or a family death. Ultimately, it means that normal daily life is disrupted including how you feed your infant.

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is important to continue in an emergency situation, because during difficult times, many other factors can threaten the health of babies and young children.

Babies who are breastfed have a secure and safe food supply, and they receive antibodies that help to prevent and treat illness.

DO

- Continue to [breastfeed](#) because you will have an ongoing supply of milk.
- Stay with your baby whenever possible.
- Express or pump if you must be separated from your baby.
- Drink plenty of fluids and remember to take time to eat food that is available.
- Check with a healthcare provider if you need to start a medication. Most medications are safe for breastfeeding mothers.
- Provide skin-to-skin contact with your baby as it maintains their temperature and provides closeness.
- Consider re-lactating if you have recently stopped breastfeeding. Contact your local health unit or health care provider for information.
- Hand express if you are trying to build your milk supply or your baby will not accept your breast.

DON'T

- Don't stop breastfeeding. It will provide proper nutrition for your baby and give protection against illnesses. It can also help to calm you and your baby.
- Don't introduce formula unless you can ensure safe water, sanitized equipment, proper storage, and a sufficient supply of formula.

Frozen breastmilk may be used in an emergency as long as it has been [kept frozen and transported safely](#). For further information, call MLHU at 519-663-5317 or call 8-1-1 ([Health811](#)) to speak to a nurse.

Formula Feeding

DO

- Prepare an emergency formula feeding kit that contains the supplies you will need for 72 hours.

- Wash your hands before preparing formula and before feeding your infant. If clean water and soap are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Ready-to-feed infant formula is the safest option if you don't have access to safe water or if you don't have power.
- Check the [water quality advisory](#) before using tap water.
- Bottled water is not sterile. Tap or bottled water that is boiled is preferred. If water cannot be boiled, bottled water that has not been boiled is the next safest option.
- Throw out bottles, nipples, or pacifiers that have been in contact with contaminated water such as floodwater.
- A disposable cup is an option to give infant formula.

How to Prepare Infant Formula

Use ready-to-feed formula if available, especially for babies at higher risk for infections (premature babies, have a low birth weight, and those with a weaker immune system). If needing to use powdered formula or liquid concentrate formula, follow these steps:

- Check to make sure the formula container is not expired, not exposed to unsafe water, and the container should not have broken seals, dents, bulges, leaks, or rust spots.
- Wash your hands with soap and water and clean your wash basin or sink and counter. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer can be used if water and soap are not available.
- If using tap water or bottled water, boil water for 2 minutes. If water cannot be boiled, use bottled water that has not been boiled.
- Follow the formula container instructions on the amount of water and formula to use.
- Measure the water first in a bottle or measuring cup, then add formula and shake to mix.

Use and Storage of Infant Formula

- If there is no power (power outage) or working refrigerator, make a new formula feed each time.
- Once formula is prepared, use within 1 hour once baby starts feeding, or within 2 hours once it is made. Do not store leftover formula that is already used by the baby.
- If there is access to a working fridge, you can store prepared formula in the fridge for 24 hours.

How to Clean Infant Feeding Items

- Clean baby feeding items (bottles, nipples, food grade safe container) before using each time:
 - Use safe water and dish soap to wash items. Use a bottle brush to clean feeding equipment and rinse with safe water.
- Sterilize bottles and nipples by boiling water for 2 minutes or sanitize using a diluted water and bleach solution (1 teaspoon bleach per 8 cups water, soak for 2 minutes). Do not rinse the items.
- Air dry items on a clean paper towel, drying rack, or hang dry items in a clean mesh bag. Dry items can be stored in a clean storage bin.

Resources

Middlesex-London Health Unit. (2022). Boil water advisories.

<https://www.healthunit.com/boil-water-and-drinking-water-advisories>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). Cup feeding infants during emergencies. <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/emergencies-infant-feeding/cup-feeding.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). Be prepared: Emergency preparation checklist for families with infants and young children.

<https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/emergencies-infant-feeding/checklist.html>

Middlesex-London Health Unit. (2023). Breastfeeding resources and topics.

<https://www.healthunit.com/breastfeeding-resources>

Middlesex-London Health Unit. (2023). Infant formula. <https://www.healthunit.com/infant-formula>

Nova Scotia Health. (2023). Infant feeding emergency preparedness for parents and caregivers. <https://www.nshealth.ca/infant-health-and-care/infant-feeding-emergency-preparedness-parents-and-caregivers>

Government of Nova Scotia. (n.d.). Emergency and disaster preparedness.

<https://novascotia.ca/emergency-education/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). How to prepare and store powdered infant formula during an emergency. <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/emergencies-infant-feeding/powdered-infant-formula.html>

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). *Facts about infant feeding during emergencies*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/emergencies-infant-feeding/facts.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/emergencies-infant-feeding/facts.html>

Government of Canada. (2022). *Preparing and handling powdered infant formula*. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/milk-infant-formula/preparing-handling-powdered-infant-formula.html>

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INFACT Canada. (n.d.). *Infant and young child feeding in emergencies*. Retrieved from http://www.infactcanada.ca/feeding_in_emergencies.htm

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Nova Scotia Health. (2023). *Infant feeding emergency preparedness for parents and caregivers*. Retrieved from <https://www.nshealth.ca/infant-health-and-care/infant-feeding-emergency-preparedness-parents-and-caregivers>

<https://www.nshealth.ca/infant-health-and-care/infant-feeding-emergency-preparedness-parents-and-caregivers>