



Feeding your baby: Preparing for an emergency

Families with babies have special considerations when preparing for emergencies. Babies are at a higher risk of getting sick because their immune systems are still developing.

There are steps you can take to safely feed your baby human milk (breast milk) or formula during emergencies. Visit [HealthLinkBC File #69g Feeding your baby: During an emergency](#). The information below can help you prepare for situations like storms, floods, wildfires, earthquakes, power outages, and evacuations.

Emergency kit supplies

What feeding supplies should I include for my baby?

Pack enough supplies in an emergency kit to feed your baby for at least 3 to 7 days. Check your kit every month to make sure you have enough supplies for your growing baby's current needs. Replace products that are expiring soon with newer supplies.

Consider having the items below ready in your kit, depending on how you feed your baby.

For all feeding methods:

- A printed copy of [HealthLink BC File #69g Feeding your baby: During an emergency](#)
- Hand sanitizer which contains at least 60% alcohol, in case you do not have soap and safe water for washing your hands

Breastfed or chestfed:

- Disposable nursing pads, if needed, for leaking milk

Expressed milk:

- A printed copy of [Baby's Best Chance: Expressing Your Milk \(PDF, 2.2MB\)](#)
- Disposable cups. These can be used to feed your baby or collect expressed milk, especially when there's no safe water to clean supplies

- Baby bottles and nipples
- Human milk storage containers or bags
- Cooler with gel cold packs which can be frozen to store milk for later use
- Bottled water, dish soap and bleach to clean and disinfect feeding supplies
- If you rely on a pump to express your milk, a manual hand pump is helpful in case there's a power outage. If you have an electric pump, pack all pump parts, a power cord and extra batteries
- A container to put clean feeding supplies in

Infant formula:

- Ready-to-feed (RTF) formula in single serving containers is preferred when possible. This is the safest type of formula during an emergency because clean equipment and safe water are not needed
- If packing larger bottles of RTF formula, you'll need feeding supplies. In a separate container, pack disposable cups or baby bottles and nipples, dish soap and bottled water for cleaning, and bleach for disinfecting

If packing liquid concentrate or powdered formula, you'll need:

- Bottled water (enough to prepare formula and clean supplies)
- Baby bottles and nipples
- A liquid measuring cup
- A food thermometer (for powdered formula)
- Disposable cups. These are especially helpful when there's no safe water to clean bottles and nipples
- Dish soap to clean supplies and bleach to disinfect

- A way to boil water. For example, a single burner camping stove with fuel, matches or a lighter, and a pot with a lid. Do not use camping stoves indoors
- A container to put clean feeding supplies in

Breastfeeding or chestfeeding

Breastfeeding or chestfeeding can help keep your baby healthy during an emergency. It can also help both you and your baby feel calm during stressful events.

Why is feeding at the breast or chest important during an emergency?

Breastfeeding or chestfeeding is the safest way to feed your baby during emergencies. This is because:

- Clean equipment, safe water and electricity are not needed. You might not have access to these during an emergency
- Human milk has antibodies that protect your baby from germs. This includes germs that can cause colds, infections, diarrhea and vomiting

Feeding at the breast or chest also helps to:

- Provide a reliable source of nutrition and hydration for your baby. If your baby is less than 6 months old, all they need is human milk, even in hot weather
- Release hormones that help both you and your baby feel calm
- Maintain or increase your milk supply

Hand expressing milk

Should I learn how to hand express milk in case of an emergency?

Though feeding directly at the breast or chest is the safest option during an emergency, there may be times when this is not possible. Hand expressing milk is an important skill to learn if you:

- Are unexpectedly separated from your baby
- Currently use a pump. This requires equipment and, in some cases, safe water and electricity. You might not have access to these during an emergency

- Have not breastfed or chestfed for a while and want to start again (relactation)

Hand expressing takes time and becomes easier with practice. Talk with a health care provider, public health nurse or lactation consultant if you need help expressing your milk.

BC has regulated milk banks. In some emergencies, donor milk might be available. If your baby relies on donor human milk, talk with your health care provider or contact [BC Women's Provincial Milk Bank](#) to understand how services may be impacted during emergencies.

For more information

- Build an emergency kit and grab-and-go bag: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-management/preparedbc/build-an-emergency-kit-and-grab-and-go-bag>
- PreparedBC emergency guides and resources: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-management/preparedbc/guides-and-resources>
- Get started on expressing breastmilk: <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/living-well/parenting/parenting-babies-0-12-months/breastfeeding/get-started-expressing-breastmilk>
- Perinatal Services BC: Informal (peer-to-peer) human milk sharing: http://www.perinatalservicesbc.ca/Documents/Guidelines-Standards/HealthPromotion/InformalMilkSharing_FamilyInfo.pdf

Note on terminology:

Chestfeeding and human milk are terms that are becoming more commonly used. They're often used by transmasculine or non-binary parents to describe how they feed their baby from their bodies. Chestfeeding, breastfeeding and human milk are used in this handout to ensure that all parents feel represented and included.