

Infant Feeding Support for Clients in an Emergency - for Small Organizations & Individuals

Suggestions for Supporting Infant and Young Child Feeding in an Emergency for Individuals & Small Organizations

Disaster and emergency response and recovery is challenging for everyone, but small organizations often face special challenges. While larger organizations have an easier time getting attention, volunteers, and resources, smaller organizations may find their staff and resources stretched even thinner, while some of their usual sources of support may be out of operations temporarily or diverted elsewhere.

Here are some ideas of what you can do to help support the people you serve in these situations - including micro-emergencies - specifically regarding infant and young child feeding.

These ideas apply to:

- Individual perinatal or lactation professionals (CBEs, doulas, IBCLCs, LCs, etc)
- Individual public health providers (WIC, etc)
- Small organizations that serve caregivers of or families with children under 3
- Anyone who works with pregnancy, postpartum, or infants and toddlers.

Discover Needs

Depending on how closely you work with the people you serve, you may already know many of their needs. Because the situation in a disaster changes rapidly, check in with them again. If you don't already have a similar assessment, use the CDC Rapid Needs Assessment or the SAFE Conversational Field Assessment. If you do have your own assessment, integrate questions from the SAFE Field Assessment to ensure that you uncover needs in any of the areas below.

- Where are they living right now?**
 - Do they have a safe play or daytime area for their child(ren)?
 - Do they have any privacy?
 - Do they have a safe sleep space for their child(ren) (shelter cots are not safe for babies or most toddlers)
 - Can they access food when they or their child is hungry?
- What is their water situation?** Is there tap water, are they using a well, or do they need to get bottled water?
 - If tap water, is it safe to drink?
 - Is there a boil water advisory? Can they boil water easily with what they have?
 - If a well, are they in an impact area? Has the well been tested?

- How are families being educated about safe drinking water, cleaning feeding equipment, etc?

Do they have consistent access to electricity?

- Do they have access to refrigeration for human milk/ prepared formula storage?
- If they use a pump, are they able to plug it in or charge it reliably?
- Is the place they are currently residing temperature-controlled?

Infant Feeding Needs

- How are they feeding their baby or young child? Breastfeeding, bottle feeding, formula feeding, mixed feeding? Are their usual local resources available and functioning?
- How are they cleaning any equipment they are using?
- Do they have a place to clean infant feeding items other than a bathroom sink?
- Is lactation support available?
- If pumping, do they have a clean pump, empty storage bags, and the ability to clean parts?

Educate Families

- Make sure they know how to clean infant and young child feeding items in their current situation. You can distribute [our handout booklet](#) if you would like. Talk to us about co-branding with your contact information.
- If safe water is unreliable, make sure they know how to make water safe to drink.
- If formula feeding or mixed feeding, ensure that they know:
 - How to mix formula properly, especially when safe water is unreliable.
 - To check expiration dates and discard formula if past dates.
 - How to store it properly. (No extreme temperatures, keeping it clean)
 - Alternate brands/types they can use that are equivalent to their current formula.
- If needed/desired, refer to lactation support, including WIC (if operating), local lactation professionals, or hotlines such as the Appalachian Breastfeeding Network.
<https://www.appalachianbreastfeedingnetwork.org/>
Call 888-588-3423 or text BFHOTLINE to 839863

Try to Partner with Other On-The-Ground Organizations

Disaster response organizations and large local groups can provide a lot of support during emergency situations. Finding ones you can partner with or refer to will help you support the people you serve better. When supporting micro-emergencies, resource organizations may be harder to find, but do exist. Food banks and crisis centers are good places for help or referrals to other resources.

As you find active organizations that can help, maintain a resource list to help you develop relationships and make referrals more quickly.

- **Start with:**

In a significant disaster, many of these groups will usually deploy to the area.

- **American Red Cross** - shelter, health, food, bathing
- **FEMA** - Immediate - supplies, search & rescue, access.
- Long-term - Funding (subject to application process)
- Other large national organizations (VOADs) that have deployed to the area, such as Team Rubicon, United Cajun Navy, Seabees, Samaritan's Purse, Save the Children, faith-based organizations, etc.

- **Medical Support**

- American Red Cross
- Emergency Response Logistics (if deployed)
- Other Field hospitals

- **Infant & Young Child Feeding Supplies** (Formula, bottles, pumps, cleaning supplies)

In addition to the groups above, try these:

- WIC (if local offices are open)
- Local church or community distribution sites
- Pediatric offices

- **Other Infant & Young Child Feeding Needs** (education, feeding & lactation support)

- Local lactation professionals (LC, IBCLC, etc)
- State or local breastfeeding coalition
- Perinatal professionals such as midwives, doulas, neonatal nurses, etc)

- **Other Needs**

- Large distribution sites can provide for many needs, such as diapers, clothing, non-perishable food, and often even larger items. The more specific and larger the item needed, the larger or more specialized the distribution site tends to need to be to have what you seek.
- Car Seats - best to find your local SAFE Kids or similar organization.
- Financial support (bills, rent, etc) is typically harder to find, and is unique to each area. FEMA provides some funding, but is often delayed.

How The SAFE Team Can Help

We on the SAFE Team want to help. We can provide:

- Information and advice on how to support safer infant and young child feeding after a disaster, including:
 - Using the Rapid Needs Assessment
 - Determining the amount of need

- Supporting distribution sites in safer practices
- Supporting safer community milk sharing

You can learn more about these topics and more in our [comprehensive Nourishing Resilience training series, available online](#), or we can provide customized training.

- Educational handouts you can distribute to caregivers of infants and young children. *Most handouts are in English and Spanish.* See our website, [SafeInfantFeeding.org](#)
 - Making water safe to drink.
 - Safely cleaning infant and young child feeding equipment.
 - Cup feeding & hand expression.
 - Safe storage guidelines for formula and human milk.
 - How to make your own cold sanitation kit.
- Training in how to run your own on-the-ground operations.
- In some situations, we may be able to provide cold sanitation kits for distribution.
- If a significant disaster occurs, we may be able to put out a call for volunteer support.
- If a significant disaster occurs, we may be able to support you in running on-the-ground operations to support safer infant and young child feeding.

	CDC Rapid Needs Assessment		SAFE Conversational Rapid Needs Assessment
https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/emergencies-infant-feeding/downloads/pages/Rapid-Needs-Assessment-Intake-Form-IYCF-E-508.pdf		https://safeinfantfeeding.org/app/uploads/2025/11/SAFE_Feeding_Visual_Handouts_Booklet_SIF.pdf	