

Feeding your baby in an emergency

Breastfeeding is the safest way to feed babies, particularly in an emergency. If this is not an option, take extra care when preparing infant formula. You will need safe, clean water and a way to sterilise equipment like bottles and teats.

Babies are at more risk of becoming dehydrated or get sick, so they need special care and attention in an emergency.

Breastfeeding is best in an emergency

If you breastfeed, do not start formula feeding in an emergency.

Breastfeeding is the safest way to feed babies, particularly in an emergency. If possible, increase breastfeeding rather than use formula.

Look after yourself by drinking safe water and eating regularly. This will help maintain your breastmilk supply.

Breastfeeding can help calm you and your baby. Continue to breastfeed even if you are concerned your milk is not flowing as well. Offering a baby a feed more frequently will help get your supply back to normal. Keep your baby close with skin-to-skin contact, where possible in a quiet comfortable place.

You may be able to start breastfeeding again if you stopped in the last few weeks.

If expressing milk

- See the advice on sterilising bottles and breast pumps. If you cannot sterilise the breast pump parts you will need to hand express into a sterilised bottle, bowl or container.
- You can keep expressed milk (fresh or thawed) for 4 hours at room temperature. If you are not sure when the breastmilk thawed, do not use the milk.

Formula feeding in an emergency

If you do not have safe water or electricity, take extra care preparing feeds. Use newborn formula for babies 0–6 months. This is suitable for older babies if you run out.

Surfaces and utensils must be as clean as possible. Use a clean paper towel on surfaces if unable to clean. Wash hands for 20 seconds. If you don't have warm, soapy water – use a baby wipe to remove visible dirt, and then use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser.

Sterilise bottles, teats and breast pump parts

- First, dismantle and wash the bottles, teats and breast pump parts that have been in contact with breastmilk in warm, soapy water, and rinse.

Sterilise in hot water

- Boil equipment at a rolling boil for 1 minute. Keep the pot covered until you need the items and use tongs to remove items. You can re-boil the water and use again.

Sterilise in cold water

- Use sterilising tablets and soak the cleaned bottles, teats and pump parts for at least 15 minutes, making sure there are no trapped air bubbles. You can keep the equipment in the solution with a lid on it.
- Make up a new solution every 24 hours. Use the old solution for washing hands or dishes.
- If you don't have a bottle, use a sterilised cup and/or spoon. Let the baby sip, don't pour formula down baby's throat. They will need practice.

Make water safe for preparing formula

- If your usual drinking water supply is not available, make sure your replacement water is safe.
- The safest water option to use in an emergency is commercial bottled water that is sealed. If your baby is less than 3 months old you must still boil this water and cool it to room temperature before use.
- Boil water for 1 minute for babies of all ages. You can boil an electric jug until it switches off, or a stove kettle until it whistles.
- Taumata Arowai has advice on boiling water: www.taumataarowai.govt.nz/for-communities/emergencies/treating-water/
- Use water purification tablets for babies of all ages, but if your baby is under 6 months, check the tablets can be used for this age. Follow instructions on the packet.

Preparing formula

Follow the instructions on the tin. Use leftover formula within 2 hours. Wash the bottle and treat with clean soapy water straight after use.

If your baby is eating solid foods

- Increase breastfeeding so they need less solid food or breast feed only.
- If you are formula feeding, but don't have enough formula, give more solid food and safe water if your baby is over 9 months.
- Before giving your baby solids, wash their hands or wipe with a baby wipe and then use hand sanitiser.
- You can use ready-to-eat baby food from the jar or pouch. Once it is opened, give it to your baby straight away – do not keep for more than 2 hours at room temperature.
- You can feed your baby with food from the family meal, just make sure the selected food and texture is suitable for the age of your baby.
- Do not give your baby food that can spoil or become unsafe if it has not been kept chilled.

- Throw away food past its best-before date. Throw away high risk food (such as meat, seafood, egg dishes, rice and prepared baby cereals) which have been at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Babies are more at risk from food poisoning than older children or adults.
- Use only thawed food that has stayed cold. Remember: If in doubt throw it out.

For more information

If your supplies are low or you need help:

- Ask neighbours.
- Shops might be open but take cash as eftpos may be down.
- Talk to Civil Defence in your area or visit your nearest welfare centre.

Phone Healthline on **0800 611 116** for free, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Talk to your pharmacist, hauora Māori provider, Pacific health clinic or doctor.

If you are feeling stressed or anxious you can text or phone **1737** anytime to speak to a trained counsellor for free.