



Infant Formula Shortage

May 2022

Some families in North Carolina are facing challenges accessing infant formulas. These challenges are related to the [February recall](#) of certain Abbott infant formulas, the resulting increased demand for other brands of formula, and the lingering effects of supply issues during the pandemic.

During these on-going shortages, our top priority is to help families access safe, healthy feeding options for their infants. NCDHHS provides the following recommendations on what families can do and what they should avoid.

What can families do?

- If a family is not able to find formula for their child, they should work with the child's health care provider to determine the best feeding plan. For cow's milk-based formula, a comparable other brand, including generic or store brand, smaller manufacturer, or organic options are generally fine.
- Families can turn to community organizations, reputable online retailers, distributors, and manufacturers as sources for finding formula. Contact [United Way's 2-1-1](#) or dial 2-1-1 to be connected to a community resource specialist affiliated with United Way who may be able to help you identify food pantries and other charitable sources of local infant formula and baby food. Certain milk banks accredited by the [Human Milk Banking Association of North America](#) are distributing donated breast milk to mothers in need; please note that some may require a prescription from a medical professional. [Find an HMBANA-accredited milk bank near you.](#)
- Families can contact manufacturers for help in finding formula:
 - [MyGerber Baby Expert](#)
 - Abbott's Customer Service: 1-877-4Abbott or 1-800-986-8540 (recall specific information)
 - Abbott's [product request line and form](#) for metabolic formulas
 - Reckitt's (Mead Johnson) Customer Service line: call 1-800 BABY-123 (222-9123)
- Families using a combination feeding of breast milk and iron-fortified infant formula may wish to consider increasing the frequency of breastfeeding or pumping so that they do not need as much formula. Families can reach out to a [local lactation specialist](#) to try and help increase their supply of breastmilk.

[WIC](#) is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children that provides benefits for healthy foods, breastfeeding education and support, and health care referrals for low-income families. For infants enrolled in the program, WIC provides supplemental assistance to help cover the cost of infant formulas in the first year of life.

WIC participants who cannot find formula in local stores should first contact their [local WIC agency](#) to get help finding available formula in the community. If formula is not available in local stores, the local WIC agency may be able to submit an order request for the formula from the manufacturer through the state WIC agency, pending availability.

For WIC participants with a specialized formula prescription, a medical provider must change the prescription. Talk with your child's health care provider about possible options during the shortage.

The WIC program also provides breastfeeding support and resources to families. Families participating in WIC may contact their local WIC clinic for additional breastfeeding support and breast pump issuance as appropriate.

- Women who are pregnant are encouraged to consult with a health care provider about breastfeeding their infant. Families feeding a baby with donor breast milk should only use milk from a source that has screened its milk donors and taken other precautions to ensure the safety of its milk, such as those accredited by the [Human Milk Banking Association of North America](#).
- If you see a formula price that seems too high, report it to the North Carolina Department of Justice by filing a complaint at <https://ncdoj.gov/gouging> or by calling 1-877-5-NO-SCAM.
- Families needing help with formula costs who have not applied for assistance are encouraged to learn more about WIC at <https://www.nutritionnc.com/wic/> or apply for FNS (formerly known as food stamps) at <https://epass.nc.gov>.

What should families avoid?

- Do **NOT** make homemade infant formula. Homemade formula recipes can be very dangerous for babies since they have not been evaluated by the FDA and may lack nutrients vital to an infant's growth.
- Do **NOT** water down formula to stretch it out; it can be extremely dangerous to your baby to do so. Always follow formula label instructions or those given to you by your health care provider.
- Toddler formula and plant-based milk alternatives are not recommended before a child's first birthday.
- Do **NOT** buy formula from online auctions, unknown individuals, or unknown origins. Storage and shipping conditions may impact formula safety. Formula from outside the United States is not regulated by the FDA, though the FDA is now exploring safe options for importing formula from other countries.

What is NCDHHS doing to help families?

- Through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), NCDHHS is helping to connect families participating in WIC directly to needed formula and placing bulk orders with manufacturers on behalf of local WIC agencies and the families they serve.
- Using flexibility from the federal government to make it easier for WIC participants to access available formula. North Carolina is already using available USDA rule waivers to help retailers continue to serve WIC-enrolled families during the shortage and help families return or exchange formulas included in the recall.
- Working with the federal government to waive additional rules for the WIC program to make it easier for WIC participants to access available formula. North Carolina has requested waivers that would give WIC-enrolled families more flexibility to purchase other types of formula and in a wider variety of sizes based on availability and health care provider recommendations.
- Providing guidance to local WIC agencies and health care providers to make it easier for health care providers to give WIC-enrolled families several options of formula types and sizes on a single prescription to meet their children's specialized formula needs.
- Monitoring the fluctuating formula supply across the state and keeping our partner organizations updated.

What other resources are available?

- [HHS: Helping Families Find Formula](#)
- [President Biden's Fact Sheet](#)
- [AAP/Healthychildren.org Resource for Parents](#)
- [FDA Consumer Page on Powdered Infant Formula Recall](#)
- [USDA Infant Formula Safety](#)
- [FDA Infant Formula: Safety Do's and Don'ts](#)
- [NCDHHS WIC Program](#)
- [USDA WIC Breastfeeding](#)
- [NCDHHS Breastfeeding Promotion and Support](#)
- [CDC's Relactation Resources](#)
- [WHO/UNICEF's Maximising Breastmilk and Supporting Re-lactation](#)
- [Ready, Set, Baby](#)
- [Establishing and Making Enough Milk](#)
- [Ready, Set, Baby Live Online Classes Schedule](#)
- [NC WIC Store Finder](#)

