

# Breastfeeding - A Lifeline in Emergencies

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**Being prepared for emergencies is smart.** They can happen anywhere, anytime. Experience teaches us that breastfeeding in times of crisis saves lives. Breast-milk is the safe and secure nourishment for babies and is instantly available. It provides protection against illness, warmth and security. Breastfed infants are **six times more likely to survive** during emergencies than formula fed babies.

## [Operational Guidance on Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies Feb 2007](#)

provides direction on support and protection of breastfeeding during emergency situations. It addresses common misconceptions, risks of formula use, discouragement of infant formula donations.

**Formula feeding can be compromised in emergencies.** Flooding can contaminate water supplies, curtail availability of utilities and sterile supplies needed to prepare formula. This may, and indeed has, led to severe diarrhea outbreaks in young children.

**Hurricane Katrina brought about widespread** destruction and displacement of tens of thousands of people, leaving them at risk for disease, malnutrition, and dehydration. Babies were at particular risk, especially those being formula fed. With the scarcity of formula and clean water, breastfeeding was the best way to ensure survival of this vulnerable population. It was important that babies who were breastfeeding continued to do so— their survival actually depended on it.



**Even in normal circumstances,** breastfeeding can mean the difference for the health and well-being of an infant. The benefits are universal, with greatest effects in the most vulnerable contexts. **Infant Feeding in Emergencies (IFE)**, an international organization focusing on emergency preparedness states that donated or subsidized infant formula and bottles should not be accepted or sought in emergencies.

**The best preparation for moms and babies in emergencies is well established breastfeeding.** A mom who successfully breastfeeds her infant may also be able to help others nurse. Surprisingly, it's possible for mothers to **re-establish breastfeeding** after weaning. (**also see American Academy of Pediatric link**). In situations like a flu epidemic, breast-milk is the only "medication" that a 0-6 month old infant can actually use to prevent the flu. When the community and emergency workers support breastfeeding, mothers and babies can "weather the storm" with confidence.

**As a community,** we can show **support for breastfeeding mothers** to help mothers achieve success. Community plans should include strategies to ensure that moms are secure, have priority access to food for the family, water, shelter and safe places to breastfeed, regardless of emergency.

References: World Health Organization on [Relactation](#); & <http://www.enonline.net>