



Infant Formula Shortage

June 2022

We know that many North Carolina families and caregivers are worried about finding formula for their babies. Formula supply is an evolving situation. Many families are having trouble finding their usual formula, and some have needed to visit multiple stores. NCDHHS is closely monitoring supply, working with the federal government, manufacturers, and retailers to get more formula on North Carolina shelves. Our goal is to ensure safe and nutritious options for North Carolina families, and NCDHHS provides the following recommendations on what families can do and what they should avoid.

What can families do?

- Most families have multiple safe options for their infants, even if their usual formula is not in stock. For standard milk-based or soy-based formula, a comparable other brand, including generic or store brand, smaller manufacturer, or organic options are generally fine. NCDHHS has created and distributed a [flyer](#) to help families understand their formula options. If a family is using specialty formula and not able to find formula for their child, they should work with the child's health care provider to determine the best feeding plan.
- Families are encouraged to purchase only the formula that they need for the next two weeks to help ease shortages.
- 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 who may be able to help you identify food pantries and other charitable sources of local infant formula.
- Pasteurized donor breastmilk from a [certified human milk bank](#) could be an option if you have the means and availability to purchase. Only purchase breastmilk from a certified human milk bank. Breastmilk purchased from other sources is NOT safe. [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
 - Abbott is making limited quantities of EleCare available for those in urgent need. Health care providers can [submit a request online](#).
 - Reckitt's (Mead Johnson) Customer Service line: call 1-800 BABY-123 (222-9123)
- More specialty and standard formulas are being imported through [Operation Fly Formula](#). This formula is being distributed through usual channels to stores or health care providers, so families and health systems do not need to make special requests for these imported formulas.
- The FDA is easing some regulations to support the import of additional brands and types of formulas from overseas. Families can follow the updates on [FDA's website](#). The FDA has also shared tips for [preparing imported infant formula](#).
- Families using a combination feeding of breast milk and iron-fortified infant formula may wish to consider increasing the frequency of breastfeeding or pumping if possible 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.

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[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.

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.

Families participating in WIC now also have [additional formula options](#) during the formula shortage. The North Carolina WIC Program is issuing benefits for more sizes of Gerber formula and two additional Gerber formula products. These changes will help families buy the formula that is available in stores throughout the shortage.

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. In addition, local WIC agencies can help doctors and families with formula prescriptions that give families more options.

- Women who are pregnant are encouraged to consult with a health care provider about breastfeeding. Families feeding a baby with donor breast milk should only purchase 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. Spanish speakers can call (919) 716-0058 to report price gouging.
- 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 Food and Nutrition Services (FNS, formerly known as food stamps) at <https://epass.nc.gov>. FNS benefits can be used to purchase infant formula.

What should families avoid?

- Do **NOT** make homemade infant formula. A baby's nutritional needs are very specific, especially in the first year of life. Homemade formula may contain too little or too much of certain vitamins and minerals, like iron.
- 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.
- Do **NOT** buy formula from online auctions, unknown individuals, or unknown origins. Storage and shipping conditions may impact formula safety.
- Do **NOT** use formula past the "best by" or "use by" date. The formula may not be safe and may have lost some of its nutrients.
- Toddler formula and plant-based milk alternatives are not recommended before a child's first birthday.

Are there short-term options in urgent situations?

- If families can't find enough formula, there may be short-term options that can help in an urgent situation. Cow's milk, toddler formula and soy milk are not recommended for babies under 1 year old, but in urgent situations they may be options. Always talk to your child's health care provider first if you don't have enough formula to feed your baby.
- You may be able to give your baby some pasteurized (not raw), unflavored, whole cow's milk if:
 - Your baby is older than 6 months.
 - Your baby drinks regular, milk-based formula, not a specialty product.
 - You can't find formula.
 - Your baby is able to take some solid foods such as iron fortified infant cereals.
 - Don't give your baby cow's milk for more than **one week**, or as instructed by your child's health care provider.
 - Since cow's milk does not contain as much iron as formula does, it's important to start introducing plenty of iron-rich complimentary foods at 6 months of age, like iron-fortified cereals.
 - Talk to your pediatrician or other health care provider if you're thinking about giving your baby cow's milk.
- You may be able to give your baby some soy milk if:
 - Your baby is close to 1 year old.
 - You can't find formula.
 - Don't give your baby soy milk for more than **one week**, or as instructed by your child's healthcare provider.
 - If you have to use soy milk, buy the kind that's fortified with calcium and vitamin D. Switch back to formula as soon as you can.
 - Avoid other plant-based milks, like oat or almond milk.
 - Talk to your child's health care provider if you're thinking about giving your baby soy milk.
- You may be able to give your baby some toddler formula for **a few days** if:
 - Your baby is close to 1 year old.
 - You can't find formula.
 - Talk to your child's health care provider if you're considering using toddler formula.

What is NCDHHS doing to help families?

- Sharing information and resources at www.ncdhhs.gov/formula.
- Monitoring the fluctuating formula supply across the state and updating partner organizations.
- Connecting 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.
- Making it easier for WIC participants to access available formula by increasing the types and sizes of formula eligible for WIC benefits.
- Making 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.
- Using available USDA waivers to help retailers continue to serve WIC-enrolled families during the shortage and help families return or exchange formulas included in the recall.

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](#)
- [CDC's Relactation Resources](#)
- [WHO/UNICEF's Maximising Breastmilk and Supporting Re-lactation](#)
- [NC WIC Store Finder](#)

Where can breastfeeding families and expectant families find resources?

- [USDA WIC Breastfeeding](#)
- [NCDHHS Breastfeeding Promotion and Support](#)
- [Ready, Set, Baby](#)
- [Establishing and Making Enough Milk](#)
- [Ready, Set, Baby Live Online Classes Schedule](#)



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