

Emergencies or disasters are unpredictable events where you and your family may be without electricity, clean drinking water, and transportation. You may not be able to cook or prepare food, or access grocery stores. These events could be the result of severe weather, disease outbreak, man-made disaster or other causes. During an emergency you may be moved from your home to a temporary location, such as an evacuation/reception centre.

Safe feeding practices are the most important way to protect babies from illness in emergency situations.

During an emergency or disaster situation, babies are at high risk of becoming seriously ill, generally due to diarrheal infections which can be life threatening. This is because their immune systems are not fully developed making them more prone to illness and less able to fight an infection. When babies are ill, they can become dehydrated quickly.

Breastfeeding during an emergency situation will help protect your baby/young child by:

- ensuring your baby has a healthy and stable source of food;
- providing protection (antibodies) in your milk that will help prevent and fight infections;
- providing comfort and warmth; and
- releasing hormones that help a mother feel calm and less stressed, and better able to care for her baby during this stressful event.

If you are breastfeeding:

Continue to breastfeed frequently, whenever your baby shows signs of hunger.

Take care of yourself. Stress does not decrease your milk supply but it can temporarily interfere with the 'letdown' or flow of milk. A quiet, private place to nurse can help.

Know your rights. Breastfeeding is a protected right meaning you can breastfeed whenever and wherever you like, including public spaces and evacuation centres.

Avoid using infant formula unless it is medically indicated. During a disaster well-meaning individuals may try to give formula to mothers with young children. If your baby is showing signs of getting enough (*feeds frequently throughout the day and has six or more wet diapers per day*) then using formula can cause problems such as decreasing your milk supply, and putting your baby at risk due to potential contamination.

If you are using expressed breast milk you can keep it at room temperature for up to 6 hours if fresh, or 4 hours if thawed in refrigerator but not warmed. If you are not sure when it thawed, do not use it. In the event of a power outage, keep any frozen breast milk deep in the freezer and only open the freezer when you need to. If you are using a breast pump, you must be able to clean it with soapy water or sterilize in boiling water for 2 minutes. If you cannot clean the breast pump, you can express breast milk by hand. See [Expressing and Storing Breast Milk](#) for more.

Can breastfeeding be used as a form of birth control?

Breastfeeding is an effective form of birth control if you can answer "yes" to all of these statements:

- ✓ Your baby is less than six months old.
- ✓ Your monthly period has not returned.
- ✓ Your baby is exclusively breastfed-meaning that your baby gets all his food from suckling at the breast.
- ✓ Your baby breastfeeds at least every four hours during the day and at least every six hours at night.

If you are not planning a pregnancy and have answered "no" to one of the statements, you will need to use another form of birth control.

If you are using infant formula:

It is safest to use **ready-to-feed**, sterilized formula to avoid potential contamination during an emergency situation.

Be prepared. Have at least a three-day supply of ready-to-feed formula on-hand in case of an emergency.

If you only have access to **powdered infant formula**, remember

- you need safe, drinkable water as not all water is safe for babies
- all water must be sterilized by boiling for 2 min
- bottles and equipment must be cleaned and sterilized before use
- [Infant Formula: What You Need to Know](#) provides detailed information about what types of water to use and how to safely prepare, store, and provide formula.

During an emergency, formula may not be available or may become contaminated due to lack of clean water, improper sterilization of equipment, and lack of refrigeration.

Do not add extra water to your baby's infant formula or make your own homemade formula. This is not safe for your baby and could make your baby sick. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have questions about infant formula for your baby or call Health Connect Ontario by calling 811 to speak to a registered nurse or dietitian.

It is safest to use formula immediately after preparing it. When storing infant formula, prepared bottles must be refrigerated at 4°C and used within 24 hours. Opened containers of ready-to-feed or concentrate formula should be labeled with the date and stored in a fridge for up to 48 hours. Discard any leftover formula after this time.

If you do not have power or safe water, use single serve, ready-to-feed infant formula.

If your baby receives a combination of breastmilk and infant formula you can put your baby to breast more frequently (as often as possible) to help increase the amount of breastmilk your baby receives. Your body can begin to make more milk when you nurse your baby more often.

Take care of yourself. Connecting with other parents can provide emotional support making it easier for you to care for your baby and other children during a stressful event.

Help is available!

Connect with a registered nurse or registered dietitian at Health Connect Ontario for secure and confidential health advice and information about feeding your baby or child by calling 811 or via chat by visiting this [website](#).

Useful resources:

[Breastfeeding Help Peterborough](#) provides an inventory of local breastfeeding clinics and supports.

[Infant Formula: What You Need to Know](#) provides detailed information about how to safely prepare, store, and provide infant formula.

[Breastfeeding Matters](#) provides a detailed description of how to position and latch your baby, how to know if your baby is getting enough milk, storing breastmilk and frequently asked questions.

[Expressing and Storing Breast Milk](#) provides information on how to express milk and storage guidelines.

[Feeding Your Baby](#) provides information to help parents and families of babies six months to one year: know when their baby is ready to eat solid foods, how and when to introduce new foods and textures, what foods and beverages to offer, safety tips and more.

Peterborough Public Health works with community partners to plan for emergency situations that could affect you and your family. To learn more about how to develop an emergency preparedness action plan for your family visit beprepared.emergencymanagementontario.ca/myplan/Default.aspx.