

Connecticut WIC Program:

Frequently Asked Questions: Breastfeeding During Emergencies

- 1. What are some emergency situations that I may need to address as a WIC nutritionist?**
 - a. Extreme weather (snow storms, hurricanes)
 - b. Fire
 - c. Power-outages

- 2. What resources are available for information or help during an emergency situation?**
 - a. 911
 - b. [Zipmilk](#) (Local lactation consultants and support; Moms can use this site to find lactation consultants who may be available for assistance)
 - c. [Local Red Cross](#)
 - d. Milk banks – [Mothers' Milk Bank Northeast](#) (When donor breastmilk is needed; Infants with a medical need will be a priority over healthy infants).

- 3. What do I tell a mom who is breastfeeding and has been displaced from her home due to a disaster or emergency situation?**
 - a. Mom should find the closest emergency shelter in her town so she is in a safe place.
 - b. Mom should not stop breastfeeding, as breastmilk is the safest and most nutritious way of feeding a baby, especially in a disaster.
 - c. If mom has stored breast milk, she should ensure that it is being kept cool in a cooler, or freezer/refrigerator. Mom can seek out freezers or refrigerators that are run on power generators if there is a power outage.

- 4. What can I tell a mom during her WIC appointment about how important breastfeeding is, especially during an emergency situation?**
 - a. Breastfeeding is the safest method of feeding a baby during an emergency situation, especially when there is no clean water supply available. “The CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend breastfeeding for optimal infant nutrition. Breastfeeding remains the best infant feeding option in a natural disaster situation. Even when experiencing diarrhea, food-borne illness, or extreme stress, breastfeeding mothers continue to produce ample milk for their babies.” (CDC)
 - b. Breastfeeding increases oxytocin, which is relaxing (if breastfeeding is established and going well). This can help to give mom and baby a source of calm in a stressful situation.
 - c. Discuss the following with mom:
 - i. Awareness of the various emergency shelters in her local area (schools, hospitals, other amenities)
 - ii. Have a back-up plan if her initial emergency plan falls through
 - iii. Have a plan in place for keeping milk stored safely (i.e – having coolers ready to go, with ice, if mom must move to a different location quickly and she needs to take her stored milk with her)
 - d. “Be prepared to go quickly and have your emergency supplies and other important items ready to go — you may not have much time. Take as much as you can with you.” (CDC)

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- e. “Take every emergency or weather warning (e.g., tornado horn or severe weather alert) seriously. Use these alerts to test your family’s emergency evacuation plan, equipment, and supplies (e.g., expiration dates, etc.)” (CDC)

5. What if a mom has stored milk and her power has gone out?

- a. Mom should open her refrigerator or freezer as little as possible, to keep the milk as cool as possible, for as long as possible. If mom does need to move the milk to a different location, she should have a cooler that is packed with ice in which to store the milk, again, opening the cooler as little as possible to maintain the temperature and preserve the milk.
- b. Mom can contact her closest emergency shelter to inquire about the possibility of temporarily storing her milk in a refrigerator or freezer there.
- c. If mom has a generator, this can be used to power her freezer/refrigerator until the power comes back on.
- d. If mom has a neighbor or relative who she is friendly with, and that person has a generator, she could ask to temporarily store her milk there.

6. What do I tell a mom who is exclusively pumping and does not have access to an electrical outlet or a safe place to pump?

- a. Discuss hand expression techniques with mom so she is able to express her milk without a pump.
- b. If baby is able, and mom is willing, mom could try to latch baby to the breast.

7. To whom should I direct a mom who is having difficulty with breastfeeding during an emergency?

- a. *If* a lactation consultant or Peer Counselor has volunteered their services during an emergency, WIC staff can provide the appropriate contact information.

8. Under what circumstances should I direct a mom to a hospital or other qualified health care provider?

- a. Mom should seek out a hospital or other qualified health care provider if she is experiencing symptoms of mastitis or other serious complications of breastfeeding affecting mom or baby.

9. What are some resources I can reference quickly to answer a mom’s questions about emergency preparedness?

- a. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohsepr/resource/infant-feeding-during-disasters>
- b. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/features/disaster-planning-parents/index.html>

Additional resource:

- Women and health professionals who need additional information about the effects of exposures related to a disaster on pregnancy or breastfeeding can call the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists (OTIS) at 1-866-626-OTIS or 1-866-626-6847 or visit [Hurricane-Related Pregnancy Information from the Organization of Teratology Information Specialists*](#)