



MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

In Emergencies Breastfeeding Can Save Lives

'Helping mothers to continue breastfeeding in emergencies protects infants, providing them with a safe and secure source of food, water and comfort', says Carey Wood, Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) spokesperson. Breastfeeding protects infants from the worst of emergency conditions and can be life saving. The ABA is celebrating World Breastfeeding Week from 1–7 August and the theme for this year is 'Breastfeeding in emergencies: A Vital Response'.

'Australia is a country prone to natural disasters such as bushfires, floods, storms, cyclones and drought. However, emergencies can include things like power outages and traffic jams — anything that prevents a mother having access to her normal resources', says Ms Wood.

Ms Wood explains that 'it is important to support breastfeeding before, during and after an emergency'. ABA has launched a business card for distribution to NGOs and emergency workers to assist with the specific needs of mothers and babies in emergencies. These include recommendations that mothers receive priority access to food & other resources, privacy, support from other women, safety, reassurance and access to skilled assistance with breastfeeding.

'Where infants are not breastfed, it can be extremely difficult to provide them with appropriate food and water in emergency circumstances, even in Australia. Delaying weaning from breastfeeding until after the emergency season has passed should be encouraged as a part of emergency plan', she said.

Emergency preparedness for the carers of formula-fed babies should include storage of additional infant formula, 24 litres of water per day for making up feeds and cleaning, detergent, a feeding cup, a gas stove, fuel, pot and kettle for boiling water. 'An emergency situation is a traumatic time for both mother and baby. Providing mothers with the appropriate care can make all the difference', said Ms Wood.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association calls on Australian aid agencies to ensure their responses to emergencies do not undermine breastfeeding through the indiscriminate distribution of powdered milk and infant formula. Aid should protect mothers and babies through support for breastfeeding and only through targeted intensive aid to the carers of artificially-fed babies. Published total mortality rates for infants under 12 months in emergencies are much higher than at ordinary times, ranging from 12% to 53%.

Infants and young children are the most vulnerable during emergencies due to increased risk of death due to diarrhoea and pneumonia. During emergencies, unsolicited or uncontrolled donations of breastmilk substitutes may undermine breastfeeding and should be avoided.

As part of emergency preparedness, hospitals and other health care services should have trained health workers who can help mothers establish, re-establish breastfeeding and/or overcome difficulties.

For more information, please visit our website: www.breastfeeding.asn.au:

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