

MEDIA RELEASE
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Guidelines on Infant and Young Child Feeding During Emergencies

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA), Australia's peak body for breastfeeding, has joined a coalition of ALMOST forty Australian peak health bodies, women's, and emergency organisations today in supporting the World Breastfeeding Trends initiative (WBTi) Australia's call for action on infant and young child feeding in emergencies (IYCF-E).

This call for action urges the Australian government to take steps to develop emergency planning targeted at the needs of infants to ensure mothers and their babies are safe within an emergency context, such as a bushfire, flood or other natural disaster. Given the increasing prevalence of these events in Australia, ABA, alongside the WBTi, is supporting families by highlighting the need for emergency planning and preparation.

Naomi Hull, ABA's Senior Manager of Breastfeeding Information and Research, says that natural disasters can be dangerous for families, especially those with new babies and young children, particularly if they are not breastfeeding or are combining breastfeeding with formula-feeding.

““Whilst older children and adults can survive on only water and basic food for several days, babies can quickly fall ill if they are not fed adequately. Breastmilk supplies all of the nutrition a baby needs and can help to protect against infections that may arise in emergency situations,” Ms Hull said.

“For exclusively breastfed babies, their health and wellbeing in an emergency is ensured so long as mothers are well supported, however at present our emergency planning does not provide for this support. This is placing infants at risk.

The caregivers of formula fed infants are in an even more difficult situation as extensive resources are needed to formula feed and again, Australian emergency planning does not lay out how these families should be supported.”

Ms Hull says that ABA continues to support the work of the WBTi in raising awareness of IYCF-E, particularly leading up to summer and the potential dangers of hot weather. Ms Hull explains that if you live in a bushfire or cyclone prone area that this time of year is not a good time to wean. Breastmilk provides food security for infants and young children.

“Continuing to breastfeed through an emergency is advised as a lack of access to resources in situations of evacuation can make preparation of formula more difficult due to loss of access to electricity or clean water,” Ms Hull said.

“We welcome this action from the WBTi and their promotion of the need for planning and preparation for IYCF-E within our Australian communities. With the upcoming Australian summer, it's important that our governments and emergency services are prepared to help protect the health and wellbeing of babies through preparing and educating themselves on emergency practices.”

The call to action is available here: <https://aba.asn.au/callforaction>

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