



**Australian
Breastfeeding
Association**

Babies: Protecting the most vulnerable in a disaster

In emergencies, babies are particularly at risk. The Australian Breastfeeding Association extends its services to families affected by the natural emergencies currently occurring across Australia.

'Our national Breastfeeding Helpline is available across Australia 24 hours, 7 days per week. Our trained breastfeeding counsellors are able to assist parents with queries relating to emergencies, regardless of how they are feeding their baby', said Mrs Rachel Fuller, President, the Australian Breastfeeding Association.

'Exclusively breastfed babies are least affected by an emergency as breastmilk provides babies with safe food and water and also acts to protect against infections that are common in emergency situations. Many babies in Australia are not exclusively breastfed and parents need assistance caring for their babies in an emergency.

'Even during extreme hot weather, breastmilk provides all of the fluid a baby needs. Giving water to a young baby can cause severe health complications like water intoxication because their kidneys are not fully functional.

'Emergencies can be very stressful. Stress will not stop mums from making milk but it can inhibit the release of milk or the let-down reflex. Our trained breastfeeding counsellors are able to reassure mothers about their milk supply and offer tips to manage feeding through the emergency.

'Older children or adults can survive with only water (or other drink) for several days. However, babies can become seriously ill within a day if they don't have appropriate food. Having an emergency plan to care for your baby is very important.

'Many mothers across Australia exclusively pump their breastmilk and rely on electric breast pumps to do so. During emergencies access to electricity may not be possible. Counsellors on the Breastfeeding Helpline are able to assist mothers to learn how to hand express.

'We suggest that mothers who are expressing pack additional antibacterial wipes for cleaning their hands. Since bottles are impossible to clean properly where water is limited, mothers may also wish to store disposable plastic or paper cups that can be used once-only to feed their baby.

'Mothers who are combining breast and formula-feeding might wish to consider whether they can return to exclusive breastfeeding. Again our breastfeeding counsellors are able to offer practical suggestions in this regard. More frequent feeding will increase the amount of breastmilk being made and within a short period of time many mothers can restore their supply', said Mrs Fuller.

Those caring for fully formula-fed infants may wish to pack an emergency kit in case they are without power or water. Dr Karleen Gribble, adviser to the Australian Breastfeeding Association and member of the Infant Feeding in Emergencies Core Group, advises that 'for those parents caring for formula-fed infants where access to clean, unlimited hot water is compromised, the use of ready-made liquid and disposable (single use) feeding equipment is recommended.

National Head Office

1818-1822 Malvern Rd
East Malvern VIC 3145

PO Box 4000
Glen Iris VIC 3146

Telephone: 03 9885 0855
Facsimile: 03 9885 0866

info@breastfeeding.asn.au

www.breastfeeding.asn.au

ABN 64 005 081 523

Breastfeeding Helpline

1800 mum 2 mum
(1800 686 268)

Lactation Resource Centre

www.lrc.asn.au

Retail Subsidiary

www.mothersdirect.com.au



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This list may assist parents caring for formula-fed infants to prepare for an emergency:

1. Ready to use liquid infant formula single serves for three (3) days (one package per feed, once the package is opened it must be used immediately or discarded)
2. A knife/scissors for opening formula packs
3. A small bowl for washing the knife or scissors
4. Detergent for washing
5. Antiseptic wipes
6. Paper towels for drying
7. 500 mL of water per feed (for cleaning hands, the knife/scissors and the formula preparation area)
8. Disposable feeding implements — bottles and teats or plastic/paper cups (enough for one for each feed because, with limited hot water, feeding containers are impossible to clean adequately)
9. A lidded plastic box for storage.

'It may also be a good idea to store solid food suitable for feeding to babies over 6 months but babies can also return to only milk feeds if solid food is not available in an emergency. In addition to feeding supplies, storing enough nappies and wipes can make coping with an emergency easier', outlined Dr Gribble.

'Our Breastfeeding Helpline 1800 686 268 is available to anyone concerned about how to safely feed their baby during an emergency. Our trained breastfeeding counsellors are able to offer assistance with breastfeeding information and as well as with cup-feeding breastmilk or infant formula', concluded Mrs Fuller.

Ends.

Media Enquiries:

NSW: Nicole Bridges 0413 726 513 or Meredith Laverty 0414 523 060

ACT/South Australia: Meredith Laverty 0414 523 060

Western Australia: Kirsten Tannenbaum 0403 225 911

Tasmania: Marion Bowen 03 6425 5780

Victoria: Jessica Leonard 0437 070 205

Queensland: Dr Maya Griffiths 0447 335 760

Links:

www.breastfeeding.asn.au

www.breastfeedingfriendly.com.au

www.worldbreastfeeding.org

About the Australian Breastfeeding Association

As Australia's leading authority on breastfeeding, we support, educate and advocate for a breastfeeding inclusive society. It is our vision that breastfeeding is recognised as important by all Australians and is culturally normal. The Association is governed by a Code of Ethics, by which our volunteers are bound.