

PARENTING IN MANITOBA

BREASTFEEDING/CHESTFEEDING YOUR BABY IN AN EMERGENCY: INFORMATION FOR PARENTS/CAREGIVERS

Emergencies and disasters can happen suddenly and without warning. They may leave you and your family without electricity, clean drinking water or transportation. These events can be caused by severe weather, disease outbreaks, floods, wildfires or other hazards.

Babies are especially at-risk during emergencies. That's why it is important to have a plan for how you will feed your baby if you lose power, don't have clean water or if you need to evacuate your home and go to a reception centre or shelter.

Safe feeding practices are the most important way to protect your baby from getting sick during an emergency. The way you prepare for an emergency will depend on how you normally feed your baby.

If you are breastfeeding/chestfeeding

Breastfeeding/chestfeeding is clean, safe and does not need electricity or running water. This makes it the best way to feed your baby during an emergency. It also helps protect both you and your baby by:

- giving your baby a stable, healthy source of food
- providing protection (antibodies) in your milk that help prevent and fight infections
- giving your baby comfort and warmth
- releasing hormones that help you feel calmer and less stressed, which can make it easier to care for your baby during a difficult time

Know your rights: Breastfeeding/chestfeeding is protected by law. You are allowed to breastfeed/chestfeed anytime and anywhere, including public spaces, reception centres and shelters.

If you are exclusively breastfeeding/chestfeeding, you can continue with confidence. Since giving formula can lower milk supply, let people know your feeding preferences so they can support you.

You can tell your baby is getting enough milk if they feed often and have six or more wet diapers each day.

Be Prepared Before an Emergency

- If you pump, plan to evacuate with your pump.
- Learn to hand express in case there is a power outage and you cannot use your electric pump, or consider adding a manual pump to your emergency kit: How to Express and Store Breastmilk –Parenting in Manitoba <https://parentinginmanitoba.ca/how-to-express-and-store-your-breastmilk/>

Breastfeeding/Chestfeeding During an Emergency

- Wash your hands before you breastfeed/chestfeed each time. If you can't use soap and clean water, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Keep breastfeeding/chestfeeding often, whenever your baby shows they are hungry.
- Feeling stressed does not lower how much milk you make, but it can slow the flow of milk for a short time. Feeding in a quiet, private space can help.
- If you usually both breastfeed/chestfeed and use formula, try to breastfeed/chestfeed more often during an emergency. This can make things easier if clean formula is harder to prepare.
- If you pump breastmilk/chestmilk or are using bottles, see - *Cleaning Bottles in Special Situations* - on the next page.

Resources:

If you have questions about feeding your baby contact:

- Your public health nurse: <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/offices.html>
- Breastfeeding hotline: 204-788-8667 (in Winnipeg); toll free 1-888-315-9257 (outside Winnipeg). Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- Health Links-Info Santé: 204-788-8209 (in Winnipeg); toll free 1-888-315-9257 (outside Winnipeg); Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- La Leche League phone support and groups: 204-257-3509
- Dial-a-Dietitian: 204-788-8248 (in Winnipeg); toll free 1-877-830-2892. Hours: Monday to Friday – 8 am to 4 pm

References:

Grey Bruce Public Health Unit: [Feeding Your Baby in an Emergency.pdf](#)

Nova Scotia Public Health Unit: [Infant Feeding Emergency Preparedness for Parents and Caregivers](#)



Check us out anytime
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Safe Use of Frozen Breastmilk/Chestmilk in an Emergency

Frozen breastmilk/chestmilk may be used in an emergency if it has been kept frozen, transported safely and has not spoiled. Follow these tips to help keep your frozen breastmilk/chestmilk safe during an emergency:

Tips for Keeping your Frozen Breastmilk/Chestmilk Safe

Preparing for power outages 	➤ Set your fridge/freezer temperature control to the coldest setting. ➤ Keep your freezer as full as possible with milk in the middle. A full freezer stays frozen for much longer (48 hours) than one that isn't full (24 hours). ➤ Fill empty freezer space with crumpled paper, lined with cardboard, or freezer blocks. ➤ Put full water bottles in empty spots and freeze them before a power outage. They help keep everything cold. ➤ Once the freezer is ready, keep the door fully closed. During a power outage, try not to open the fridge or freezer. If you do open it, close the door as quick as possible.
Packing frozen milk for evacuation 	➤ Use a well-insulated cooler big enough to hold your milk. ➤ Line the bottom of your cooler with cardboard (corrugated cardboard is a good insulator). ➤ Place your milk bags in the cooler. ➤ Fill any extra space with more crumpled paper. Packing it tightly helps keep everything cold longer. ➤ Place another layer of cardboard or paper on top of the milk. ➤ Place frozen gel packs or ice blocks on top of the paper. ➤ Seal the cooler with duct tape to help it stay closed and prevent spills if it tips over. ➤ Keep the cooler closed until you have reached your destination.
Safe consumption and refreezing of breastmilk/ chest milk 	➤ If frozen milk has been in a fully packed cooler and is still partly frozen, it can be refrozen. ➤ Once the milk is fully thawed, it should be used within 24 hours. ➤ If the power went out and came back on while you were away, the milk in the freezer may have thawed and then refrozen. The milk is not safe to use and should be thrown out.

Use the instructions below only in emergencies when you do not have the equipment you normally have and a kitchen to clean feeding equipment. If you are not in an emergency, follow proper sterilizing methods for feeding equipment - <https://parentinginmanitoba.ca/how-to-sterilize-your-formula-feeding-equipment/>. If you are staying at a shelter or hotel, ask staff if they have the equipment you need to sterilize such as a pot and stove or a kettle.

CLEANING BABY BOTTLES IN SPECIAL SITUATIONS

• When you don't have a kitchen • Staying in a hotel or boarding home • In an emergency



1. WASH YOUR HANDS WITH SOAP AND WATER.



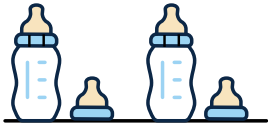
2. CLEAN BOTTLE AND NIPPLE WITH HOT SOAPY WATER.

Clean bottles and nipples. If you are **re-using** the ready-to feed infant formula bottles it is important to clean them.



3. RINSE BOTTLE AND NIPPLE WITH WARM WATER.

Place them on a clean surface to dry.



4. YOUR BOTTLES ARE NOW READY TO ADD BREASTMILK/ CHEST MILK.