

KEY MESSAGES

- ***In emergencies, breastfeeding remains the safest, most nutritious and reliable food source for infants under the age of six months.*** Breastmilk is always the right temperature, requires no preparation and is readily available even in settings with limited access to clean water and adequate hygiene. Breastfeeding continues to offer these benefits through the ages of 6–23 months as children eat their first solid foods.
- ***Breastfeeding in emergencies saves lives.*** Breastmilk contains antibodies and other components that protect children against deadly infections—no matter where they live. This life-saving protection is especially vital in emergency contexts, where access to clean water and hygienic conditions—needed to prepare and use powdered infant formula—are frequently compromised, increasing the risk of diarrhoea and other diseases. In a study on the aftermath of an earthquake in Indonesia, researchers found the risk of diarrhoea in children under 2 years of age had more than doubled for those who received a donated breastmilk substitute compared with those who were breastfed.
- ***Breastfeeding mothers need support during emergencies.*** With adequate support, virtually all mothers can breastfeed, even in emergency situations. Support for mothers includes privacy and space (for example in “mother and baby tents”, psychological support, counselling and assistance with attachment and positioning.
- ***The nutritional needs of lactating mothers should receive sufficient attention in emergency response.*** Lactating mothers have increased nutritional requirements. With proper nutrition, for example through the provision of additional food rations and adequate liquids, mothers can continue breastfeeding.
- ***The need for breastmilk substitutes in humanitarian situations must be carefully assessed by skilled personnel, free from conflicts of interest.*** If need is established, breastmilk substitutes should be purchased—not donated—to ensure that the procurement and distribution of these products matches needs and is done in line with international guidance.

Sources:

https://www.unicef.org/nutrition/files/8_Advocacy_Brief_on_BF_in_Emergencies.pdf

<http://www.usbreastfeeding.org/emergencies>