

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Ohio Department of Health, WIC program working to aid families during formula shortage

COLUMBUS -- Ohio Department of Health Director Bruce Vanderhoff, MD, MBA today announced that department officials requested that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) allow for greater flexibilities in order to expand access to infant formula for families amidst the national formula shortage.

"We recognize that many Ohio families are finding themselves struggling to find appropriate food for their infants, and we are advocating for them," said Dr. Vanderhoff. "We have been in ongoing and direct communication with formula manufacturers, and USDA and HHS leadership, urging them to do all they can to promptly reduce barriers to formula access."

While Ohio's Women, Infant, and Children's program (WIC), the program that provides nutrition assistance to young families, contracts with Mead Johnson and not Abbott, the company experiencing the shortage, the department has applied for USDA waivers to potentially extend even more flexibilities to families purchasing infant formula using WIC benefits.

The WIC program currently has waivers in place to add additional formula choice and size options for impacted specialty formulas to provide greater options for families.

At the local level, WIC staff are working closely with impacted participants to help them locate the appropriate formula, including contacting physicians and retail outlets to problem solve and identify additional options.

In addition, WIC staffers have met with vendors and retailers asking them to rapidly stock shelves as additional formula arrives.

Many participants in the WIC program have medically complex needs and are on prescription formula. WIC works with dietitians and healthcare providers to find the best solution to keep these infants healthy.

For families impacted by the infant formula shortage, the department recommends:

- Never dilute your formula. Diluting infant formula with water or other liquids can be dangerous and even life-threatening for babies.
- Do not try to make homemade formula. Homemade formulas often have inadequate amounts of critical nutrients. Other consequences can include severe nutritional imbalances to foodborne illnesses, both of which can be life-threatening.
- Consult with your infant/child's healthcare provider for specific nutrition recommendations as they will know best what is right for your child.
- Call the store to ask about product availability.
- If you do not see the formula you need on the shelf, consider kindly asking a store associate for assistance.

- If you rely on WIC benefits for your formula and are unable to locate it at a WIC vendor, consider going to a non-WIC store to purchase formula with your SNAP or TANF benefits.
- Consider talking to the pharmacy to ask for help if your child is on a specialized formula.
- If your child is on a specialty or medical formula, call their healthcare provider to ask about adjusting their prescription to an appropriate alternative formula.
- If you need help increasing milk supply, reach out to WIC for help or call the 24/7 Breastfeeding Hotline at 888-588-3423 or text “BFHOTLINE” to 839863.
- If funds are available, and a medical need is present, pasteurized donor milk may be available, at cost, through the [Ohio Health Mother’s Milk Bank](#); (614) 566-0630.
- Those participating in WIC may contact the state office at 1-800-755-GROW (4769) or their local WIC office for assistance.

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About the Ohio Department of Health

The Ohio Department of Health’s mission is advancing the health and well-being of all Ohioans by transforming the state’s public health system through unique partnerships and funding streams; addressing the community conditions and inequities that lead to disparities in health outcomes; and implementing data-driven, evidence-based solutions.