

# UNICEF UK BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

## STATEMENT ON INFANT FORMULA IN FOOD BANKS

**Updated 12 November 2020**

Unicef UK has been alerted to recent media stories which imply that the Baby Friendly Initiative is refusing to allow food banks to provide formula milk to families in need. In this unprecedented time during the coronavirus outbreak, there has been concern that the financial situation of some families is deteriorating rapidly, leaving them unable to afford infant formula or food for their baby.

Babies are extremely vulnerable and how they are fed in the first months of life can have a profound effect on their short- and long-term health. The Baby Friendly Initiative works with UK public services to support the implementation of evidence-based best practice standards for infant feeding. To this end, Unicef UK has produced new guidance in partnership with the charity First Steps Nutrition and the National Infant Feeding Network (NIFN) – a network of over 700 infant feeding specialists – to encourage local authorities and public health teams to take the lead in meeting the needs of vulnerable families during the pandemic, including where appropriate, distributing consistent supplies of infant formula to protect babies and families during this crisis.

Unicef UK recognises and admires the incredible work being undertaken by food banks and community volunteers to support local families. However, food banks cannot guarantee timely or consistent supplies of infant formula and their staff and volunteers cannot be expected to assess, plan and put in place the strategies needed to ensure that the short- and long-term needs of babies are met in what can often be very complex situations. Rather, this is the responsibility of the statutory services (including health visiting, public health, social services etc.) and it is important that this is recognised and acted upon if we are to ensure the safety of our most vulnerable citizens. Therefore, Unicef UK strongly recommends that all local authorities have a clear pathway for the distribution of infant formula as part of the local authority emergency food provision system. We also recommend that food banks put into place a robust referral system and that staff are trained to trigger this if they are concerned that babies are in danger of not being fed.

If food bank staff are concerned that their local authority does not currently have a robust referral system in place, then we suggest they contact them to find out what is in place, and if needed, to highlight their concerns and agree a pathway of care, which includes referral to an appropriate health professional.

If a food bank is struggling to make an immediate referral, then an emergency payment could be given to the family to enable them to buy their baby's usual infant formula, while the food bank completes the referral process for ongoing support.

For further information and guidance please see our [Guide for Local Authorities - Infant feeding during the coronavirus \(Covid-19\) crisis](#).