

# UNICEF UK BABY FRIENDLY INITIATIVE

## INFOSHEET ON THE PROVISION OF INFANT FORMULA FOR FAMILIES EXPERIENCING FOOD INSECURITY

**Updated October 2022**

The UK Committee for UNICEF (UNICEF UK) is aware that an increasing number of families are at risk of or are currently experiencing financial hardship and that this may leave some families unable to afford infant formula or appropriate foods for their baby – both of which have [risen in cost](#). In addition, there have been reports of parents struggling to afford the infant formula they require and questions raised about how Local Authorities or Health Boards and food banks can help them to access the help they need.

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 and safety. The Baby Friendly Initiative works with UK public services to support the implementation of evidence-based best practice standards for infant feeding. Importantly, UNICEF UK fully supports *all* parents' and caregivers' decisions on how they feed their infant, and we provide support and guidance on both breastfeeding and feeding a baby with infant formula.

We believe all parents should be able to swiftly access support for themselves and their babies when they need it, and that no family in crisis should be turned away without further support. Local Authorities and Health Boards have a duty of care to safeguard all infants under the age of 12 months affected by family hardship – however they are fed – including with the provision of infant feeding support. We recommend development of pathways of wrap-around care which enable families to access services they require to meet their ongoing needs.

Food banks (or equivalent) may be the first point of contact for families in crisis. We recognise and admire the work being undertaken by food banks and community organisations to support local families to access food in a crisis. However, whilst the contributions food bank staff and volunteers make are vital, the responsibility of providing infant formula in a crisis should not rest on their shoulders. This is because food banks rely on donations which may not be suitable and therefore they are unable to guarantee a timely or consistent supply of infant formula to meet the baby's needs.

Additionally, food bank staff and volunteers cannot be expected to assess, plan and put into 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. This is the responsibility of the statutory services (including maternity, health visiting, public health and social services) and it is important to work to support this if we are to ensure the safety of our most vulnerable citizens.

Therefore, UNICEF UK encourages all Local Authorities or Health Boards and/or public health teams to take the lead in meeting the needs of vulnerable infants and their

families, including where appropriate, distributing consistent supplies of an appropriate infant formula. To enable this, UNICEF UK strongly recommends that all Local Authorities or Health Boards have a robust pathway of wrap-around care and clear processes for the targeted distribution of infant formula and family support as part of their local emergency response system – regardless of the family’s status or rights to recourse to public funds – and that they communicate this pathway to local food banks and agencies supporting vulnerable families.

If food bank staff are unaware of whether their Local Authority or Health Board have a robust pathway or referral system in place, then as a guide on what actions to take, they could consider making an emergency cash payment (if possible) and/or calling the out-of-hours social Local Authority or Health Board care lines or local safeguarding hub for guidance.

We then suggest the food bank staff contact the health visiting service, public health team or Local Authority or Health Board to discuss and agree the following:

- how to make a referral to the appropriate health professional to support families in crisis
- how to support an application for the Healthy Start (Best Start in Scotland) scheme, which provides financial support that can be used towards the purchase of First Stage infant formula
- how to access other support options for families experiencing hardship
- how to link in with available local infant feeding support
- the development of a pathway of wrap-around care for families in need requesting infant formula and/or infant feeding support.

### **Further information**

Whilst recognising that this is a very difficult issue with few easy solutions, in the interest of trying to secure the best possible outcome for the baby in the short and long term, UNICEF UK recommends the following:

- Food banks continue to offer families [food for the parents and older children](#) to help ease the overall burden on the family.
- Food banks do not accept or distribute donations of infant formula for babies. It is suggested that food banks consider wording relating to this on their website and literature where requests for donations are being made. This is due to:
  - concerns for the safety of the baby, consistency of supply and the fact that there is an array of different products on the market and getting an appropriate infant formula from a food bank cannot be guaranteed
  - the potential risk of providing an inappropriate infant formula (for example, if the baby is under six months old, a follow on formula would be inappropriate and could cause harm)
  - the potential risk of families being delayed from being referred for further support they require and are eligible for.
- Food banks are encouraged to publicise and promote the Healthy Start/Best Start schemes. For those who are eligible, the allowance can be used towards purchasing infant formula and other foods. The Healthy Start scheme is not an immediate

response, but pregnant women and families with children under four who are getting income-based benefits and tax credits can apply (see below).

- In some areas, Local Authorities or Health Boards provide crisis loans, vouchers or referrals for essential items such as food or furniture. Information on accessing emergency support can be found at the debt charity [Step Change](#). Additionally, [The Household Support Fund](#) Department for Work & Pensions scheme, launched in September 2021, is available with the objective to provide support to vulnerable households to help with significantly rising living costs.
- Staff/volunteers working at food banks should be informed about how to refer families with babies to the health visiting service and locally commissioned specialist infant feeding team where available.
- Foods marketed as suitable for infants under four months of age should not be distributed as this contradicts UK public health recommendations. People keen to donate to support young families should be encouraged to offer other food and non-food items that the [family can benefit from](#).

For further information and guidance please see our [Guide for Local Authorities: Supporting families with infants under 12 months experiencing food insecurity](#).

### **Help for parents who visit food banks**

Infant feeding support for parents however they feed their baby:

- [National Infant Feeding Network \(NIFN\)](#): A network of 700 NHS infant feeding specialists who work to share evidence-based practice around infant feeding and very early childhood development in order to deliver optimum health and wellbeing outcomes for mothers and babies.
- [National Breastfeeding Helpline](#): Tel: 0300 100 0212
- [Association of Breastfeeding Mothers](#)
- [The Breastfeeding Network](#)
- [NCT Infant Feeding Line](#): Tel: 0300 330 0700
- [La Leche League](#): Tel: 0345 120 2918
- [UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative](#)
- Scottish Government: [Parent Club](#) and [Best Start Grant](#)

### **Healthy Start**

Visit [Healthy Start](#) to learn more, including eligibility criteria and how to apply. For further information, email, phone or write to Healthy Start [here](#). In Scotland, the [Best Start scheme](#) is available for pregnant women and children up to three years of age.

### **Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers**

#### [Maternity Action](#)

- Asylum-seeking mothers are entitled to some additional payments during pregnancy and their child's early years. See Maternity Action's page on [maternity rights and benefits for asylum seekers](#).

- Mothers whose asylum claim has been refused may be entitled to support during their pregnancy. See Maternity Action's page on [maternity rights and benefits for refused asylum seekers](#).
- Those who have refugee status are entitled to the same maternity benefits as any other UK resident.
- Those who are nationals of the European Union or European Economic Area countries may be entitled to the same maternity benefits as any other UK resident, but this depends on their circumstances. See Maternity Action's page on [maternity rights and benefits for EEA and Swiss nationals and family members](#).
- Those who are migrants with 'no recourse to public funds' as a condition of their visa (e.g. work visa, spouse visa) may be entitled to some maternity benefits. See Maternity Action's page on [maternity rights and benefits: no recourse to public funds](#).
- Some migrants are not entitled to any maternity benefits.

**Asylum support:** This organisation provides information on housing and money while waiting to find out if asylum has been granted, as well as information on state school provision for children and healthcare from the NHS. This includes information on how to apply for short-term support if asylum has been refused.

**UK Visas and Immigration:** UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) can be contacted from inside or outside the UK. Follow the 'Find contact details' button to be directed to the most appropriate source of assistance.

**The Refugee Council:** This council works with refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK offering practical support and advice throughout the UK.

### Policy Bulletins

- Page 78: Additional payments to pregnant mothers and children aged under 3
- Page 37: Maternity Payments.