

# Resource Guide: Ohio's Infant Formula Shortage



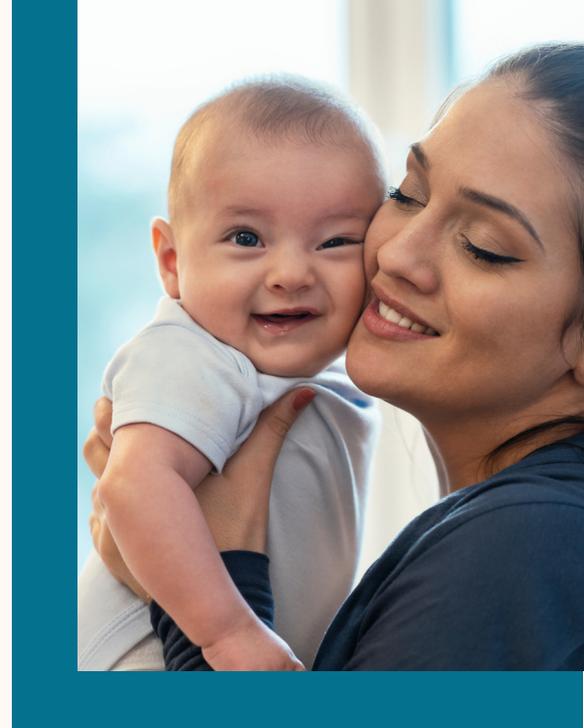
Updated July 2022

The infant formula shortage has had substantial impacts on families in Ohio and nationwide. Many parents and caregivers are worried about how they will feed their young children and meet their nutritional needs. *This Guide compiles information, guidance and key resources on the infant formula shortage to assist Ohio's families and community partners in navigating this crisis.*



## How did the infant formula shortage start?

In early 2022, Abbott's facility in Sturgis, Michigan, was closed due to unsanitary conditions and concerns about bacterial contamination after four infants fell ill and two subsequently died. This facility closure exacerbated already existing supply chain issues and worker shortages that arose during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although initial reports indicated the Sturgis facility would resume production in early June, that timeline was delayed to July 1 when production resumed on a specialty formula. Combined, these issues have contributed to a severe infant formula shortage that is impacting families with young children nationwide and in Ohio.



## Who is most impacted by this shortage?

As state agencies and other community partners work to support Ohioans during this crisis, the following groups may be most impacted by the shortage:

- Families with low incomes, including those receiving the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Families living in underserved communities (urban, rural, Appalachian) with limited access to grocery or convenience stores
- Families lacking transportation access
- Families of color who are disproportionately represented in the groups above

## What government actions were taken to address this shortage?

Government leaders at the federal level and in Ohio have taken several actions to address the shortage and mitigate the negative impacts on families with young children.



### Federal Government

The federal government, including the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), has offered waivers to states to alleviate the impacts of the shortage. The federal government invoked the Defense Production Act in May 2022 to increase infant formula production and launched Operation Fly Formula to expedite the transportation of safe, high-quality formula supplies from abroad. According to reports, as of

July 1, Operation Fly Formula has completed 32 flights and imported almost 19 million 8-ounce bottle equivalents of infant formula. To find out more about formula from abroad, visit [Helpful Facts About Imported Formula](#), or to learn about measurement conversions from abroad, visit [Formula Conversion Chart](#). The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has also addressed rigid restrictions to importing formula from countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and European authorities to increase supplies in the U.S.

The federal government has committed to providing transparent and timely information to families experiencing the impacts of the crisis. President Biden’s Administration released a [Fact Sheet](#) outlining efforts to increase the availability of formula in the U.S.



### State government (Ohio)

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) has been working to put out information regarding the formula shortage. ODH issued a [Formula Shortage FAQ](#), and has released several shortage-related publications available on their website: [WIC Program Description & Formula Shortage Info](#).

As of June 27, 2022, the state of Ohio has requested the following waivers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to ease restrictions for WIC participants who are purchasing formula:

- **Maximum Monthly Allowance: Food Packages** (granted to Ohio WIC on May 18, 2022), allows participants to receive alternate container sizes — including those that are bigger than usual and in different forms (i.e., ready to feed containers)
- **Medical Documentation Waiver** (granted to Ohio WIC on May 18, 2022), allows participants to receive a different brand of formula without a doctor’s prescription
- **Vendor Exchanges** (granted to Ohio WIC on February 23, 2022), allows stores to exchange recalled formula purchased with WIC benefits

## What can you do if you are having trouble finding formula?

Families that are experiencing challenges in finding formula have a few options that may be helpful as they navigate this shortage:

- **Switch to safe formula brand substitutes.** For most babies, there is no issue with switching formula brands as long as they are of comparable makeup. When introducing a new formula, experts recommend introducing small amounts of the new formula mixed in with the existing formula. If your baby tolerates the change well, begin increasing the amount of new formula and decreasing the existing formula gradually over time. For comparable formulas, visit [NASPGHAN Tools for Infants and Children Affected by Formula Shortages](#).
- **Talk to your pediatrician about short-term solutions.** Pediatricians have a great deal of insight into the shortage and the options available, including what other patients are doing to access what they need. At times, pediatricians have infant formula samples they can give you.
- **Explore the use of breast milk or breastfeeding, if possible.** There are many options available to explore the use of breastmilk to feed your baby.
  - If you have been breastfeeding and would like support to *increase production*, contact a lactation consultant through your OB's office, pediatrician, by visiting [CDC - Find Breastfeeding Support](#), or connect with WIC's Breastfeeding Support services at [WIC Breastfeeding Support](#) or the [Ohio Statewide Breastfeeding Hotline](#) at 888-588-3423.
  - If you would like to look into purchasing breastmilk, you can visit resources such as the [Human Milk Banking Association of North America](#) to find a milk bank near you.
  - If you would like to learn about starting to express breastmilk after you have stopped, there are resources for relactation, such as [Relactation: Starting Over with Breastfeeding](#).
- **Utilize community resources to help locate formula.** Resources such as food banks, public health departments, Community Action Agencies (CAAs), United Way's 2-1-1 program and nonprofit organizations may have insights into where to find formula within the communities they serve. Additionally, some formula manufacturers have developed locators, such as [Enfamil Store Locator](#).



### Make sure to avoid unsafe solutions including:

- Watering down formula so it lasts longer
- Abruptly changing formulas or using formula that does not meet the dietary needs of your baby, such as using dairy-based formulas when you need soy
- Using expired formula
- Making your own formula using “recipes” found online: [Is Homemade Baby Formula Safe?](#)
- Purchasing excessive amounts of formula, which further limits what is available

## What about families enrolled in WIC?

Families utilizing WIC have felt especially damaging consequences of the formula shortage due to restrictions on purchasing formula. Ohio Governor Mike DeWine announced that the Ohio WIC Office received approval of [Additional USDA Waivers](#), which allows families enrolled in WIC to purchase eight additional Mead Johnson products, specifically Enfamil formulas, effective June 13, 2022. This has allowed families to access a broader range of options with their WIC cards if their primary formula or approved can size is unavailable. WIC-approved substitutes for brands or sizes of formulas can be found here [WIC Infant Formula Alternatives](#).

In Ohio, some major retailers (i.e., Target, Trader Joe's, and ALDI among others) do not accept WIC. As a result, families utilizing WIC may have access to the formula they need but do not have the means to purchase it out of pocket.

## What about families who need prescription formula?

Families in need of hypoallergenic or specialty formula may experience greater challenges in finding safe substitutes. These types of formulas require a doctor's prescription and are often used to treat dietary and physical conditions such as allergies, reflux or digestion issues. When alternate formulas are consumed — even if similar in composition — babies are susceptible to allergic-like reactions such as rashes, eczema and possibly asthma.

If a child has a specific health need that cannot be met by formula availability in their area, the parent or caregiver should contact their pediatrician or primary health care provider. They will be able to advise on comparable specialty formulas that are safe for use. On a case-by-case basis, providers may be able to [request limited quantities of specialty formula from Abbott](#).

## How can you help others find formula?

As a community partner, family member, or friend who wants to help someone find the formula they need, you can:

- **Help identify where formula is in stock.** Take note of the brands and quantities of formulas you find as you visit stores in your community. Post and share what you find on social media or in your community or neighborhood chat groups.
- Touch base with families close to you or families that you serve and find out what kind(s) of formula they need. You can pick up formula for these families if you find what meets their needs at a store.
- Help families call around to stores to see what they have available at that time.
- **Donate any nonessential formula** you have on hand that is not expired.
- If you are breastfeeding and have extra breastmilk in the freezer, **donate your breastmilk!** Visit [Donate Your Breast Milk in 4 Simple Steps - Become a Donor Today! \(milkbank.org\)](#).
- **Report price gouging.** Families in search of formula have identified people taking advantage of the shortage to sell formula online for radically high prices, sometimes up to 300% higher than retail. Ohio does not have a statute that directly addresses price gauging, but you can report price gouging to the Ohio Attorney General's Office at [www.OhioProtects.org](http://www.OhioProtects.org) or 1-800-282-0515.



## Additional resources for families and community partners

- [Baby Formula Shortage: What to Do & What Not to Do](#) – Fact Sheet, Groundwork Ohio, The Center for Community Solutions, and the Children's Defense Fund Ohio
  - Española: [Escasez de Leche de Fórmula para Bebés: Qué Hacer y Qué No Hacer](#)
- [Find Formula During the Infant Formula Shortage](#) – HHS
  - Española: [Encuentre leche de fórmula durante la escasez de fórmulas infantiles | HHS.gov](#)
  - Tiếng Việt: [Tìm Sữa Công Thức Trong Thời Gian Thiếu Hụt Sữa Này Cho Trẻ Sơ Sinh | HHS.gov](#)
  - Kreyòl: [Jwenn fomil pandan mank fomil tibebe a | HHS.gov](#)
  - Navajo: [Find Formula During the Infant Formula Shortage](#)
- [Formula Shortage: What Parents Can Do](#) – Nationwide Children's Hospital
- [Infant Formula: Safety Do's and Don'ts](#) - U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA)
- [Infant Formula Supply & Safety](#) – USDA Food and Nutrition Service
- [New Resources for Parents & Caregivers to Address Infant Formula Shortages](#) – Ohio Chamber, American Academy of Pediatrics
- [What Should You Do About the Baby Formula Shortage?](#) - Cleveland Clinic
- [With the baby formula shortage, what should I do if I can't find any?](#) – FAQ: HealthyChildren.org from the American Academy of Pediatrics
  - Española: [Por la encases de leche de fórmula para bebés, ¿qué puedo hacer si no consigo?](#)

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