

## **Memorandum**

**To:** District of Columbia (DC) Healthcare Providers

**From:** Thomas Farley, MD MPH

**Date:** May 20, 2022

**Subject:** National Infant Formula Shortage – Guidance for Healthcare Providers

Memo # 0520-2022

This memo provides updated information about the availability of infant formulas and how healthcare providers can counsel parents of infants.

On February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Abbott Nutrition announced a recall of certain powdered infant formulas, including Similac, Alimentum, and Elecare, manufactured in its Sturgis, Michigan facility. Abbott recalled these products after learning of four cases of *Cronobacter sakazakii* or *Salmonella newport* infection in infants who had consumed powdered infant formula manufactured in this facility. The recall did not include soy formula, metabolic formula, or liquid infant formula.

The Abbott formula recall is one of several factors, along with labor shortages and pre-existing supply chain problems, now contributing to a national shortage of infant formula in various forms.

### **Formula Availability in the District of Columbia**

Based on monitoring at grocery retail stores, supply of name-brand and store-brand infant formulas appears to be limited, but available. The week of May 16<sup>th</sup>, DC Health visited 8 grocery stores in the District and found limited supply of standard formulas (such as Similac Advance, Enfamil Neuro Pro, Gerber Good Start) and shortages of “sensitive” formulas (such as Similac Sensitive, Enfamil Neuro Pro Sensitive, Gerber Good Start Gentle) and soy-based formulas (such as Similac Isomil, Enfamil Prosobee, Gerber Good Start Soy). In general, it appears standard Similac products are more available than standard products with other brand names. DC Health will continue monitoring store level supply throughout the infant formula shortage.

### **DC WIC Response**

The DC Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (DC WIC) provides the following affected products to WIC program participants: Similac Advance, Similac Sensitive, Similac Total Comfort, Similac for Spit-Up, Alimentum, and Elecare Infant and Jr.

Since the beginning of the formula recall, DC WIC has taken advantage of flexibility provided by USDA to remove barriers for families:

**Store Exchanges** – DC WIC families can exchange recalled formula at the store it was purchased. WIC customers should be treated as any other customer and provided the same options for return or exchange.

**Formula Substitutions** – DC WIC families have temporary flexibility to purchase a range of infant formula brands in various container sizes. The [attached chart](#) is designed to help WIC families in selecting appropriate substitute formulas. If families are at the store and find that the formula on their WIC EBT card is out of stock, they should call their WIC clinic during business hours to switch to alternative brands or container sizes. After hours and on weekends, families should call 202-442-9397 or go to [www.dcwic.org](http://www.dcwic.org) and click on “Trouble Finding Formula?” to submit an online form. All updates to WIC EBT cards will take place with the family on the phone and do not require an in-person visit. Also, DC WIC families are encouraged to opt for concentrated liquid forms of their usual formula instead of powder, as the recall affected powdered formula from Abbott.

DC Health continues to work with its WIC formula vendor, local retail stores, and its WIC grantees [Children’s Hospital, Unity Health Care, Mary’s Center, Howard University Hospital] to support all families receiving DC WIC benefits and ensure continuous access to infant formula. DC Health and its WIC grantee partners are also helping DC WIC families to find and purchase the appropriate formula to meet their infant’s nutrition needs. For more information, visit [www.dcwic.org](http://www.dcwic.org)

## **Guidance for Providers**

### **Formula Substitutions**

The [attached chart](#) is designed to help you assist all families in selecting appropriate substitute formulas. All the included substitute formulas for **Similac Advance, Similac Sensitive, Similac Total Comfort, and Similac for Spit-Up** meet WIC’s federal nutrition standards. WIC families are able to purchase these substitute formulas with their WIC benefits at stores.

### **Special Formula**

It is important to note that specialty infant formulas and medical foods are typically not sold in traditional retail stores. These products often require a prescription and are sold through specialty pharmacies and other specialty distribution channels such as medical product suppliers.

- Parents and caregivers of infants and children using these products should contact their child’s health care providers if they have questions about the use of these products.
- For infants and toddlers on special formula affected by the recall, Abbott will work directly with providers to deliver formula to families. Providers can call Abbott at 1-800-881-0876.
- DC WIC families using a special formula affected by the recall should call their WIC clinic. WIC will work with the family and their health care provider to find a suitable alternative formula. The health care provider will complete the [DC WIC Medical Prescription Form](#) to authorize the substitute formula and submit the signed form to the WIC clinic for processing.

### **Advice to Families**

- For infants who are not breastfed, an infant formula is the best option, even if this means changing brands or formulation (e.g. powder vs. ready to feed vs. concentrate).
- **Do not feed your baby cow’s milk.** At this time, while standard infant formula is available, DC Health is not recommending that parents feed infants less than 12 months of age cow’s milk as a substitute for infant formula. If formula availability worsens substantially, DC Health will consider issuing updated recommendations on this topic.
- **Don’t make homemade infant formula.** Families should not make their own homemade infant formula—the risk of contamination or improper nutrition content is too high.
- **Properly prepare and store infant formula.** Families should follow the preparation instructions on the infant formula container. Families should not dilute infant formula to “stretch” formula.
- **Buy only what you need:** While a stressful time, families should purchase only the infant formula they need in the immediate and avoid stockpiling. This will help ensure other families have access to critical formula for their infants and allow manufacturers and retailers adequate time to restock shelves. Many retailers are capping how many cans of formula can be purchased to allow for a greater number of shoppers to access the limited supply of formula in the interim.
- **Buy from safe retailers:** Families should pay close attention to online retailers of infant formula to ensure they are legitimate and safe sources, especially with a possible increase of online scammers.
- **Introduce solid food around 6 months:** Families are encouraged to introduce solid foods around 6 months of age for infants who are developmentally ready, although this will not replace the need for formula.

For more information regarding the Abbott recall and resources to support families, see below:

1. **DC Health 2/19/2022 Press Release:** [DC Health Advises Parents with Infants to Avoid Using Possibly Contaminated Infant Formula](#)
2. **Abbott 5/16/2022 Press Release:** [Abbott Enters into Consent Decree with U.S. Food and Drug Administration for its Sturgis, Mich., Plant; Agreement Creates Pathway to Reopen Facility](#)
3. **President Biden's 5/22/2022 Press Release:** [President Biden Announces Additional Steps to Address Infant Formula Shortage](#)
4. **American Academy of Pediatrics:** [With the baby formula shortage, what should I do if I can't find any?](#)
5. **USDA:** [Keeping Infants Safe in Midst of Formula Shortages](#)
6. **CDC:** [Prepare and store powdered infant formula \(English and Spanish\)](#)
7. **Abbott Online Product Recall Check:** [Similac Recall](#)

If you have any questions, please contact the WIC State Agency at 202-442-9397 or [info.wic@dc.gov](mailto:info.wic@dc.gov).

Sincerely,

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