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Pritzker Administration Takes Action to Support Families Amid Baby Formula Shortage

IDPH Urges Families Not to Hoard Products; IDHS Opens Hotline For Consumers; Safeguards in Place for WIC Families

SPRINGFIELD—The State of Illinois is taking a series of important steps to help families get the safe formula they need in response to the current, nationwide infant formula shortage.

In coordination with the USDA Food & Nutrition Service, Illinois retailers are being encouraged to set aside formula for low-income families enrolled in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program.

The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) has also trained caseworkers to assist families with formula questions IDHS Help Line at **1-800-843-6154**. The Help Line is designed for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and WIC customers primarily but is open to all residents of Illinois.

“The ongoing formula shortage has brought undue stress into the lives of new parents, and my administration will do everything in our power to help families maintain access to formula,” **said Governor JB Pritzker**. “We’ve partnered with our suppliers and continue to ramp up our support centers to ensure our residents, especially low-income families, have what they need to care for their babies.”

State public health officials are urging families to purchase a modest supply of formula during the shortage, which is expected to ease in the coming weeks.

“We have a special obligation to WIC families. About one-half of babies born in Illinois participate in WIC in the first year of their lives” **said IDHS Secretary Grace B. Hou.** “We will continue to do everything possible to safeguard their development and access to safe, nutritious formula.”

As of March 2022, there were 43,568 infants active on the WIC program.

“We understand that the ongoing recall leaves parents and caregivers very concerned about how they will feed their babies and children with rare diseases and conditions who rely on formula,” **said IDPH Acting Director Dr. Amaal Tokars.** “We want to remind families during this time to avoid attempting to make ‘homemade’ formula, or to hoard supplies of formula from stores.”

The formula shortage has been caused by a combination of issues. In mid-February, the FDA recalled products from several brands of baby formula produced by Abbott Laboratories, including some types of Similac, Alimentum and EleCare after babies became sick from consuming them.

Supply chain problems associated with the pandemic have also played a role in the shortage. Since February, the IDHS WIC unit has been troubleshooting related customer concerns, but with today’s statewide hotline expansion, IDHS hopes to support many more families to obtain the formula they need.

Illinois contracts with Mead Johnson, the Chicago-based manufacturer of “Enfamil” to exclusively supply standard infant formulas for Illinois’ WIC customers. Mead Johnson has ramped up production of its two most used products by over 10% in March and April and 60% in May as compared to pre-recall.

IDHS is working closely with Mead Johnson, retail vendors statewide, and Catholic Charities to ensure all families, and especially those in the WIC program, can access formula.

Illinois offers direct support to WIC-eligible families through a network of 96 local agency providers. Providers include local health departments, community-based organizations, and hospitals.

Illinois has about 1,500 authorized retail vendors -- including Walgreen’s, Jewel, Kroger, Meyer, Hy-Vee, and CVS -- that accept WIC “Electronic Benefit Transfer” (EBT) cards. There are also 16 WIC Food and Nutrition Centers (FNC) in the Chicago area operated by Catholic Charities, which are available only to WIC participants.

The steps Illinois is taking reinforce measures taken by the USDA and the US Food and Drug Administration to improve the supply and ensure the safety of infant formula across the United States.

For families whose babies require specialty, metabolic formulas, the FDA recently informed Abbott Nutrition that the agency has no objection to releasing urgent, life-sustaining supplies of certain specialty and metabolic formulas on a case-by-case basis. Abbott has established a request line for patients and caregivers seeking access to their specialty formulas: 1-800-881-0876.

For even more information, including a list of FAQs and the most current information for Illinois consumers, please visit www.DHS.Illinois.Gov/BabyFormula.

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