

Infant Feeding: Tips for Food Safety

Human Milk

Proper food safety procedures are essential when expressing, handling, and storing human milk. Unsafe handling procedures can result in bacterial growth and illness.

- Wash hands thoroughly before expressing human milk
- Collect human milk in clean, sterile containers
- Label and date the containers
- Refrigerate human milk for no longer than 72 hours
- Freeze human milk for as long as three to six months
- Thaw human milk rapidly by holding the container under tepid running water
- Do not refreeze human milk; discard if it is not consumed within 24 hours
- Discard human milk left in the bottle after a feeding
- Never use a microwave oven to thaw or warm human milk
- Never use a microwave oven to warm infant formula because this practice is dangerous

Infant Formula

Infant formula is available in a variety of forms, such as ready to feed, liquid, concentrate, and powder. However, once infant formula is opened, it is highly perishable. Keep the following guidelines in mind when encouraging your participants to feed their infants and children safely:

- Wash the top of the can with hot, soapy water before opening it
- Use clean equipment and utensils
- Use cold tap water and bring to a rolling boil for one to two minutes. Allow water to cool no more than 30 minutes before mixing with formula. Avoid prolonged boiling or re-boiling greater than 5 minutes; these practices will cause further water evaporation and concentration of any lead present
- Throw out unused formula that has been unrefrigerated for one hour or more
- Use prepared formula immediately or refrigerate. FDA recommends to follow storage instructions per manufacturers. Typically, storage instruction will entail using refrigerated formula within 24 hours if it was made from powdered formula or within 48 hours if it was concentrated or ready-to-feed formula. Freezing infant formula is not recommended
- Discard any formula left in the bottle after a feeding

Store-Bought Infant Food

Some WIC participants may automatically assume that infant food purchased from the store must be completely safe. However, this is not always the case. Even store bought infant food requires safe handling. Here are a few important guidelines to remember:

- Buy clean and intact cans; discard a can that is dented or stained on the outside
- Discard a jar if the vacuum seal appears broken
- Do not purchase or use foods after the “use by” date
- Wash jars and cans with hot, soapy water before opening
- Serve jarred food immediately, store opened jarred food in the refrigerator and use within 48 hours (use infant food meats within 24 hours)
- Do not freeze jarred infant foods
- Put infant food in a bowl; do not feed from the jar

Infant Feeding: Tips for Food Safety (cont.)

Home-prepared Infant Food

Infants are more susceptible to harmful effects from contaminated food than older children or adults. As a result, parents and caregivers must be diligent when preparing and storing home-prepared infant food.

- Wash hands, utensils, and work surfaces before preparing any food
- Use fresh foods. Making infant foods from leftovers is not recommended
- Serve immediately, or refrigerate and use within 48 hours; use meats and egg yolks within 24 hours
- If preparing infant food in large batches, freeze the food immediately in individual portions and use within one month
- Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator or under cold running water; refreezing home-prepared infant food is not recommended
- Do not feed home-prepared spinach, beets, turnips, carrots, or collard greens, which are high in nitrates, to infants under 6 months old. www.fns.usda.gov/TN/Resources/feedinginfants-ch12.pdf.
- **Honey should never be given to infants under one year of age.** Honey can sometimes be contaminated with *Clostridium botulinum* spores, which can cause botulism in infants. It is generally not fatal, but is a serious food-borne illness

Use Safe Water Resources

The water that participants use to prepare infant formula can come from a variety of sources, including public water, bottled water, and well water. Instruct participants to boil any water they use when preparing infant formula and to consult their pediatricians for more information on safe water sources.

Food Allergies

As a WIC staff member, you should know about common allergenic foods, such as milk, eggs, soy, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, and wheat. During WIC nutrition assessments and counseling sessions, be sure to ask participants about any known allergies and the family's history of allergies. It is also important to remind parents and caregivers to introduce only one new food at a time to infants and young children and to wait 3-5 days between introductions. This can help in spotting food allergies.

Choking

Participants need to know that certain foods should not be given to infants to reduce the risk of choking. Choking can be caused by the size, shape and consistency of certain foods. Always supervise infants when they are eating, keep mealtimes calm and cut up food into small pieces. See the **Job Aid: Foods Associated with Choking** for more information.