

Infant Feeding: Tips for Food Safety

Human Milk

Proper food safety procedures are essential when expressing, handling, and storing human milk. Unsafe handling and cleaning 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.
- Freshly pumped/expressed human milk may be stored at room temperature up to 4 hours.
- Refrigerate human milk for up to 4 days.
- Freeze human milk for up to 6 months.
- Milk may be thawed in several ways, such as holding the container under warm running water.
- Do not refreeze human milk; discard thawed human milk if not consumed within 24 hours.
- Discard unused milk left in the bottle within 1 to 2 hours after the baby is finished feeding.
- Never use a microwave to thaw or warm human milk because this practice is dangerous.

Formula

Formula is a perishable food, and therefore, must be prepared, handled, and stored properly and in a sanitary manner to be safe for consumption. Babies can be exposed to harmful bacteria from a dirty environment, pets, and other family members.

- Emphasize the importance of cleanliness during preparation to include keeping bottles, nipples and other utensils clean and sanitary.
- Instruct caregivers to always wash their hands before preparing formula, handling bottles, or feeding.
- Emphasize that water used for preparing formula must be from a safe source. The local health department can help determine if a participant's tap water is safe to prepare formula.
- Instruct caregivers to follow the directions on the formula labels for proper formula preparation, use, and storage instructions, or those given by their healthcare provider.
- Refer caregiver questions regarding the use of local drinking water or well water or bottled water to prepare formula to their healthcare provider.

Store-Bought Infant Food

Some WIC participants may assume that infant food purchased from the store is safe. However, this is not always the case. Even store-bought infant food requires safe handling.

- Buy clean and intact containers; discard any containers that are dented or stained on the outside.
- For jars, make sure that the safety button on the lid is down. Discard any jars that don't 'pop' when opened or that have chipped glass or rusty lids.
- For plastic pouches, discard any packages that are swelling or leaking.
- Do not purchase or use foods after the 'use-by' date.
- Wash jars and containers 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.

Home-Prepared Infant Food

Infants are more susceptible to harmful effects of 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.
- When counseling caregivers who give infants complementary foods before the recommended age (about 6 months), assess if the baby is developmentally ready. Additionally, caution against using certain vegetables (spinach, beets, turnips, collard greens, green beans, squash, and carrots) before 3 months of age, per the AAP, since these may contain large amounts of nitrates. Nitrates are chemicals that can cause an unusual type of anemia (low blood count) in young babies. Commercially prepared vegetables are safer because the manufacturers test for nitrates.
- Never give honey 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.

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. Have children sit down while eating. Children should never run, walk, play, or lie down with food in their mouths.

The following foods are not recommended for infants and young children because they are associated with choking:

- Whole, raw, or hard pieces of partially cooked vegetables (cherry or grape tomatoes, carrot rounds, baby carrots, green peas, string beans, celery, corn, whole beans, etc.).
- Whole or raw fruit (grapes, melon balls, etc.); especially those with pits or seeds or whole pieces of canned fruit.
- Tough, stringy, or large chunks of meat or cheese, as well as fish with bones, hot dogs, meat sticks or sausages.
- Peanuts or other nuts and seeds; chunks or spoonfuls of peanut butter.
- Popcorn, potato/corn chips, pretzels, crackers or breads with seeds, and plain wheat germ.
- Hard candy, jelly beans, caramels, gum drops/gummy candies, chewing gum, or marshmallows.