

Breastfeeding during Disaster¹

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Transcribed from the Family Album Radio Program, a co-production of University of Florida IFAS Extension, the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences and of WUFT-FM. If you'd like to learn more, please visit our website at familyalbumradio.org

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As we've learned over the past couple of years, disaster can strike anyone, anywhere, and anytime. A natural disaster, whether hurricane, tornado, flood, or tsunami, can devastate areas and leave families without resources, sometimes for long periods of time. And while people of all ages suffer, infants can be at far greater risk. However, mothers can save their infants' lives and protect them from illness by simply breastfeeding, even if they haven't been breastfeeding their baby.

While medical and nutrition experts have long supported breastfeeding as the optimal way to nourish an infant, during disasters when the risk of contaminated water increases dramatically, breastfeeding can be even more critical. Breastmilk protects infants from respiratory illness and diarrhea, problems that can become fatal to a vulnerable infant displaced by disaster. Experts say breastfeeding can also "promote psychological health and comfort during stressful times. Human milk reduces pain and promotes more rapid healing after injuries and infections" (La Leche 2006a).

Even mothers who have not been breastfeeding can start up to 6 months after giving birth. According to the La Leche League, if a mother has given birth within five days, she "can have a full milk supply quickly by breastfeeding the baby, every two to three hours or more frequently" (La Leche League, 2006a, ¶ 7). Even up to six months after giving birth, a mother can relactate (La Leche League, 2006a)!

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Since breastmilk is mostly water, mom should stay hydrated (La Leche League, 2006b). For more information on breast-feeding during emergencies, go to our website at <http://familyalbumradio.org> or to <http://lalecheleague.org>.

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To listen to the radio broadcast:

http://www.radiosource.net/radio_stories/463.mp3

http://www.radiosource.net/radio_stories/463.wav

References

La Leche League International. (2006a). Breastfeeding during emergencies. Retrieved March 20, 2007, from <http://www.llli.org/FAQ/emergency.html>.

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United States Department of Health and Human Services. (2005). Disaster or emergency preparedness for women. Retrieved June 20, 2006, from <http://www.4woman.gov/tools/disaster.cfm>.