

September 8, 2005

TO: Hospitals, State WIC and Public Health Programs in
Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Florida, and Texas

RE: Impact of Breastfeeding in Emergency Situations

As health professionals and public health workers in States affected by Hurricane Katrina, you are caring for families under the most difficult and stressful circumstances imaginable. The International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA) thanks you for your passionate and untiring efforts, and wishes to join you in providing support to new families.

As you help families begin the recovery process, please consider the importance of human milk and breastfeeding in providing optimal nutrition and health. Although research studies well document the important health reasons to breastfeed, the devastation of this storm has been a poignant reminder of the importance of breastfeeding in emergency situations. The American Academy of Pediatrics reminds us in its open letter of September 7, 2005 that human milk protects the most vulnerable from illness and disease, especially critical under situations of displacement, poor sanitation, inadequate food sources, threat of infection, limited travel, and severe anxiety. Breastfeeding also allows mothers and families to hold onto something positive and hopeful as they struggle to regain a sense of normalcy in their lives.

International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) can help. IBCLCs are health care professionals with specialized skills in supporting breastfeeding, and are ideal members of emergency volunteer teams assisting pregnant women, mothers, infants, and young children. IBCLCs are already at work in evacuee areas such as Baton Rouge, Houston, Austin, and San Antonio, assisting breastfeeding families at shelters and providing information on the importance of breastfeeding to expectant mothers.

ILCA's position paper, *Position on Infant Feeding in Emergency Situations*, provides recommendations to humanitarian aid workers involved in feeding infants and children. This document, attached, is also available as a free download on the ILCA website, www.ilca.org. Detailed technical guidance on infant feeding in emergencies can also be found on the website of the Emergency Nutrition Network, www.enonline.net/ife/index.html.

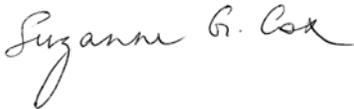
As health care professionals, there are several ways you can encourage breastfeeding. ILCA and its members have resources and technical assistance to join you in this effort:

- Encourage all pregnant and newly birthing mothers to breastfeed their babies. Remind them that human milk is available, safe, sanitary, and protects babies from infections and disease.
- Alert new mothers who have recently delivered that breastfeeding can begin at any time during the early weeks. An IBCLC can help mothers induce lactation, or relactate if they have weaned.
- Urge mothers who are currently breastfeeding to continue exclusive breastfeeding for at least the first six months, and to continue breastfeeding to at least one year or longer, even after starting other foods.
- Make referrals to local International Board Certified Lactation Consultants. ILCA's "Find a Lactation Consultant Directory," available to the public online at www.ilca.org, makes it easy to access IBCLCs in your community.

ILCA is pleased to provide your organization with a complimentary copy of our brand new document for healthcare workers, *Clinical Guidelines for the Establishment of Exclusive Breastfeeding*, to help you in your efforts. Simply contact the office to request your copy. In addition, ILCA members who are located throughout the United States, stand ready to assist your mothers with breastfeeding support, and ways to access safe, quality breast pump equipment suitable for expressing milk in displaced situations.

For more information, visit the ILCA website at www.ilca.org, or contact the ILCA Office at info@ilca.org, or (919) 787-5181, ext. 209.

Sincerely,



Suzanne Cox, President
International Lactation Consultant Association