

September 8, 2005

TO: Emergency relief workers

RE: Impact of Breastfeeding in Emergency Situations

As emergency and disaster relief workers, 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.

There are several simple, practical ways that you can support breastfeeding families who have been displaced by the tragedy of this storm:

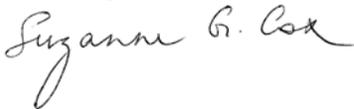
- Create private, quiet areas for mothers to breastfeed in shelter environments. This can be as simple as a screened off area, or a sheet draped over a clothesline to afford privacy.
- Provide clearance for local International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) in your community to provide practical help and support to breastfeeding mothers in your shelter. You can access the names of IBCLCs in your community by going to the ILCA “Find a Lactation Consultant Directory” at www.ilca.org. IBCLCs are health care professionals with special skills in supporting breastfeeding, and are ideal members of the emergency volunteer teams assisting pregnant women, mothers, infants, and young children.
- Remind breastfeeding mothers that continuing to breastfeed is the most important gift they can give their child during this time. Encourage them to breastfeed exclusively for at least 6 months, and to continue for at least a year and as long after that as they wish.

- Let new mothers who did not choose to breastfeed know they can still initiate breastfeeding if they are in the early weeks after the birth of their child. An IBCLC can help mothers induce lactation or “relactate” to give safe, sanitary, infection-fighting milk to their babies.
- Let mothers know that breast pump equipment is available if they wish to express their milk for baby. Many breast pump companies, WIC programs, and public health groups are providing free breast pumps and equipment to new mothers displaced by the hurricane. IBCLCs in your community can help them access these important resources.

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.

ILCA and its many members throughout the country stand ready to assist you in your efforts to promote, protect, and support breastfeeding. 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