

PRESS RELEASE



Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHCC works to ensure equitable access to infant formula for all CNMI families

The impacts of the ongoing pandemic and the recent 2022 Abbott recall of certain powdered formulas has led to shortages of infant formula across the nation. The infant formula supply chain problems have affected all consumers, including CNMI families.

On May 13, 2022, [the U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\) released press release 0106.22, urging state agencies to adopt flexibilities to support families amid the recall.](#)

Amid the 2022 Abbott recall, the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation (CHCC) Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) and Maternal, Infant, Child, and Adolescent Health (MICA) programs closely monitored reports of the recall of infant formula and expediently secured supply to ensure equitable access for all CNMI families.

The CHCC has taken the following actions to meet the needs of CNMI families:

1. Facilitated supply coordination efforts with infant formula manufacturers/distributors to increase formula distribution and help stabilize shelf supplies in the CNMI. Collaborative efforts with CNMI formula distributors have allowed for more access and increased importation of non-recalled infant formula, specialty formula, and a variety of infant formula brands approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Additionally, partnership with Abbott Nutrition has afforded the CNMI WIC program to avail multiple relief shipments that help increase WIC vendor shelf stock and meet the needs of both WIC and non-WIC participants.

Infant formula can be found at any WIC-vendor location and other markets:

Saipan		Tinian	Rota
San Roque Market	Joeten Dandan	J & J Market	Sinapalo Safeway
Capitol Hill Market	Joeten Susupe	Lucky Qiang	Anne's Convenient Mart
XO Market	New Downtown Market		
Joeten Hafa Adai	Blue Sky Market		
Joeten Kagman	Hannam Market		

2. For WIC families, the CHCC maximized approved USDA waivers for regulatory flexibilities including:
 - a. **Maximum monthly allowance:** A waiver to provide administrative flexibility to exceed the maximum monthly allowance (and to issue multiple container sizes and physical forms) for infants in specific food packages.

- b. **Medical documentation:** A waiver to provide administrative flexibility to allow for the issuance of non-contract brand infant formula without medical documentation for infants in specific food packages.
 - c. **Vendor exchanges:** A waiver to allow WIC-authorized vendors to treat WIC participants like all other customers when they exchange recalled products at the store.
3. Provided continued support and resources
- a. **Awareness and communication:** The CHCC continues to provide transparent information and relevant updates to families, vendors, and stakeholders via public information releases, tele-messaging, social media, and/or phone calls.
 - b. **Nutrition education and breastfeeding services:** The CHCC WIC clinic staff continue to encourage and educate participants to practice safe feeding options following guided resource materials, provide breastfeeding and lactation support, accommodate questions, and make appropriate referrals. Those enrolled in the CHCC Home Visiting Program are also provided with information and support for accessing safe feeding options among households that may potentially be impacted.
 - c. **Resources:** The CHCC continues to share resources and reference materials/sites on infant formula safety, guidance for families and caregivers, and to consult pediatrician and/or family doctors for alternatives.

As the nation faces infant formula shortages, the CHCC will continue to prioritize and expand efforts to secure infant formula for the CNMI community. The CHCC will also continue to monitor infant formula redemptions, track shipment of supplies, request emergency relief, maximize waivers, and provide consistent and transparent information.

Helpful information for parents and caregivers:

1. **Never dilute formula.** Diluting infant formula with water or other liquids can be dangerous and even life-threatening for babies, leading to a serious nutritional deficit and health issues.
2. **Avoid homemade formula** like coconut water or rice water. These are not safe substitutes. Homemade formulas often lack or have inadequate amounts of critical nutrients. For example, babies fed homemade infant formula have been hospitalized due to hypocalcemia (low calcium).
3. **Other store-bought substitute formulas are OK.** For most babies, if their regular brand of formula is not currently available, it is OK to substitute it with a similar version. If families have questions about which formula is acceptable, or if they are still having difficulty finding formula, they should contact their child's pediatric provider or WIC.
4. **Talk to your doctor.** Families should consult their pediatrician if their babies or children require a specialized formula and need a recommendation for a comparable formula to use.

The CHCC Population Health Programs encourages the CNMI community to stay informed and seek assistance from their primary care provider for any immediate concerns.

For questions or if you are having trouble finding infant formulas, WIC participants can call (670) 664-4084, H.O.M.E. participants can call (670) 664-8702, and other community members can call MICAH at (670) 287-7718.

For more information regarding infant formula shortages and feeding tips, visit links below:

[President Biden Announces Additional Steps to Address Infant Formula Shortage](#)

[Food and Nutrition Services: Infant Formula Safety](#)

[USDA: Keeping Infants Safe in Midst of Formula Shortages](#)

[FDA Takes Important Steps to Improve Supply of Infant and Specialty Formula Products](#)

[U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Infant Formula Feeding, Nutrition](#)

For more information about CHCC programs, follow @cnmichcc on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; visit <https://www.chcc.health>; or call (670) 234-8950.

This press release may be found online at <https://www.chcc.health/pressrelease.php>.