

DISASTER READY



Michigan Breastfeeding Network

MIBFN POSITION PAPER: IN SUPPORT OF BREASTFEEDING AS A VITAL COMPONENT OF DISASTER READINESS

Overview

In Michigan, public health emergencies and environmental disasters have become the norm rather than the exception in both urban and rural areas. The frequency and scope of such disasters are on the rise. Emergency preparedness training should include breastfeeding protection as the optimal method of feeding for infants and children. In the aftermath of future disasters, breastfeeding protection and promotion must be standard policy. Equitable breastfeeding support ensures that the most vulnerable have access to human milk and its life-saving protection during times of crisis.

Policy Recommendations

Breastfeeding saves lives. Breastfeeding should be a part of every disaster readiness plan, no matter the scale of the disaster during times of environmental, public health, or political crises. Statements on infant feeding during disasters from the World Health Organization (WHO), United States Breastfeeding Committee (USBC), and United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) prioritize breastfeeding support and management and recommend breastfeeding always take precedence over the distribution of infant formula.

In support of breastfeeding as a vital component of disaster readiness, Michigan Breastfeeding Network (MIBFN) advocates for the following:

- **All emergency shelters should adopt a clear written policy supporting and protecting breastfeeding during times of crisis.**
- **All first responders should receive evidence-based breastfeeding training.**
- **Medical providers in areas with ongoing air/water pollution should understand blood contamination levels that would contraindicate breastfeeding.**
- **Vulnerable areas should undergo systemic breastfeeding changes to ensure best outcomes during times of disaster.**
- **Disaster response policies should ensure that Infant formula is only supplied when necessary.**
- **The United States should comply with the WHO Code in order to protect breastfeeding.**

Vision for the Future

MIBFN envisions a future in which breastfeeding is part of every disaster readiness plan, supported by both written and legislative policies for the protection of all families in Michigan. Human milk is one of the most valuable resources in communities around the state. How we advocate for babies to receive human milk, especially during times of crisis, is key to equitable health outcomes. In times of crisis, equitable distribution of resources, such as lactation support and accessibility to human milk, is vital for public health based on breast milk’s ability to prevent hunger, stave off disease, combat malnutrition, and prevent young infant and child death.