

Breastfeeding When Disaster Strikes

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Whether to breastfeed is one of the single most important decisions a new mother can make to assure health and contentment for her baby. This natural process is not only nutritionally sound, but a most beautiful and loving way of getting to know your new baby. The benefits of breastfeeding for both mom and baby are not just measured in terms of health, but also in the pride a mom feels when she looks at her healthy, growing breastfed baby.

Every year, August 1-7, in more than 120 countries, World Breastfeeding Week is celebrated to encourage breastfeeding and improve the health of babies around the world. The theme of World Breastfeeding Week 2009 is "Breastfeeding - a vital emergency response. Are you ready?" It highlights the need to protect, promote and support breastfeeding in emergencies for infant and young child survival, and their health and development.

Emergencies can happen anywhere in the world. Every year, natural and man-made disasters and emergencies affect hundreds of thousands of people. From a house fire, to an earthquake or other natural disaster in a community, to the economic crisis of losing a job, a family can experience an emergency at any time. Emergencies destroy all that is "normal," leaving parents struggling to cope and infants vulnerable to disease and death. Whenever there is an emergency, we think of the children who have been affected and want to do something to help them. Children are among the most vulnerable groups during emergencies, and small children are the most vulnerable of all, due to increased risk of death due to diarrhea and pneumonia.

New parents have a responsibility to make sure their baby will get off to a good nutritional start. A choice to breastfeed is a choice that shows that they feel this is the best and most ideal way of feeding their baby. There is no doubt that breast milk contains all the nutrients required and is perfectly matched for a baby's needs for proper growth and development. Breast milk can be credited with helping in the development of the baby's brain, and aiding in the growth of the very important immune system, the body's way of fighting diseases and infections. Studies continue to show that breastfed babies are even less likely to develop ear infections, respiratory illness and diarrhea and may reduce the risk of childhood/adult obesity.

At Livingston County Health Center, we encourage all new mothers to at least try to breastfeed, and then to continue breastfeeding "one day at a time." The benefits of breastfeeding start right away. Truly, even one day can make a difference in a baby's health. As with anything, there are challenges. No woman is born knowing how to breastfeed, and there are things that just don't seem to work quite the way "the book" says, or the way they are "supposed" to. We're frankly, only human, and we may need to "tweak" things a little (so to speak). Sometimes, we just need a little help and/or encouragement to work through those learning days when we are tired, frustrated and really just want to pop a bottle in their mouths. Trust me, the benefits to both

mom and baby are well worth working through it. And, yes, most things do get better by morning. “One day at a time.”

And, when the going gets even tougher, breastfeeding is a safety net when a disaster strikes and is life-saving for babies in a crisis situation. Having a plan of support in place before an emergency occurs is essential. The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action’s 2009 World Breastfeeding Week theme focuses on the importance of supporting breastfeeding before, during, and after an emergency happens. Breastfeeding takes commitment and the support of family, health care providers, and the community.

At the Center, we willingly offer our time, knowledge, and encouragement to any new or expectant mom who needs or requests it. Don’t hesitate to call us for information or support. Also, consider attending our breastfeeding support group that meets the first Tuesday of every month at 5:30 p.m. Bring a friend, or plan to make one. See you there!