



April 3, 2020

Dear [Name of Provider's Office]:

It has recently come to our attention that your office may be offering human milk substitutes (infant formula) to patients in the midst of the COVID19 pandemic. **We urge your office to counsel and support families to initiate or continue breastfeeding during this time of crisis instead of providing human milk substitutes to them.**

Detroit area families are being affected tremendously by COVID19, and lack of breastfeeding support harms Black, Latinx, and Native/ Indigenous families who suffer disproportionately from health disparities linked to formula feeding. Infant formula is a 70 billion dollar industry and its marketing practices have historically undermined breastfeeding for Black families and other marginalized groups. We would like to point out the dangers of distributing infant formula- whether in small or large quantities- and offer alternatives for safe, equitable breastfeeding support for families during this difficult time.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), human milk and breastfeeding remain the best infant feeding option during a crisis. [1] Human milk has natural immunities and antibodies that protect infants and young children when exposed to disease and infection. This protection is especially important during the COVID19 crisis. Based on WHO and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, powdered infant formula and other human milk substitutes should NOT be handed out to families during emergencies. [2]

Michigan Breastfeeding Network (MIBFN) advocates for evidence-based breastfeeding interventions to establish, promote, and support breastfeeding for families. Drawing on our Disaster Readiness policy recommendations, breastfeeding during emergencies is the best way to preserve infant health. [3] Frequent breastfeeding helps to increase milk supply and reduces reliance on infant formula. Human milk provides optimal nutrition for infants and young children during emergencies and breastfeeding support is crucial during this time. Breastfeeding also offers food security in times when substitutes may be scarce or unaffordable and simply not sustainable.

Southeast Michigan IBCLC's of Color (SEMI) offers breastfeeding education and skilled lactation support for families in the Metro-Detroit region. International Board Certified Lactation Consultants are available for consultations with families to protect, support, and promote breastfeeding in the face of COVID19, while addressing fears from within the community about the safety of human milk. SEMI has been busy developing infographics to educate families during the COVID19 pandemic and has first-hand experience addressing breastfeeding concerns in their community. Information about resources, including infographics, breastfeeding classes, and support groups can currently be found on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SMIBCLCsofColor/>, Instagram: [semichibclcofcolor](#) or by emailing us directly at [semichioc@gmail.com](mailto:semichioc@gmail.com).

Often during times of global crisis, human milk substitute corporations flood marginalized communities with free products, which ultimately cause long-term harm once the crisis is over, leaving communities to pick up the pieces of imposed harmful practices long after. We look forward to serving in solidarity with you.

Sincerely,

Michigan Breastfeeding Network  
Southeast Michigan IBCLC's of Color

1) World Health Organization, "Breastfeeding in emergencies: a question of survival," May 2016, available at: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/commentaries/breastfeeding-in-emergencies/en>

2) Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Disaster Planning: Infant and Child Feeding." <https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpao/features/disasters-infant-feeding/index.html>

3) Michigan Breastfeeding Network, Disaster Ready Advocacy Campaign, <https://www.mibreastfeeding.org/disaster-ready>