



Wednesday 24th May 2023

**We are writing to you as healthcare professionals, Baby Banks, charities, and social work professionals to ask you to take just two small and simple actions to support the health and wellbeing of families with formula fed infants during the current cost of living crisis.**

The cost of infant formula has soared over the last year - with the price of some brands increasing by more than 25%. As a direct consequence, families are struggling to meet the nutritional needs of the most vulnerable members of our society. Research by the charity Feed has also found that parents are skipping meals in order to purchase formula for their babies.[1] A recent Sky News investigation has found that families unable to afford formula are resorting to unsafe infant feeding methods and some are resorting to formula theft from local stores and supermarkets; something you are no doubt aware of given the introduction of security tags on infant formula in recent months.[2]

While we work towards broader, long-term solutions for families experiencing food poverty, we are asking that your company takes two straightforward steps to better support customers with formula fed infants:

### **Step One: Make Public Health information on infant formula available at the point of sale**

Infant formula is an essential food for most babies in the UK, and all infant formula on the UK market must meet compositional regulations as outlined in The Nutrition (Amendment) and Food for Specific Groups (Food for Special Medical Purposes for Infants, Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula) (Information and Compositional Requirements) (Amendment) [Regulations 2021](#). Furthermore, if an ingredient is found to be beneficial to infant health, it is required by law to be added to all formula brands. Thus, cheaper brands meet the same compositional standards as more expensive brands. Unfortunately, many parents are unaware of this information, and believe more expensive formula brands have more health benefits for their babies. Research conducted by First Steps Nutrition Trust has previously found that, among families of formula-fed babies, 40% agreed with the statement that “more expensive formula milks have better ingredients in them” and 39% also agreed that “some formula milks are better than others as they have more ingredients.”[3] Thus, we request that you make this information available on shelf edge point of sale sleeves, on your website and in any other materials that reference infant formula (such as Baby Club or loyalty scheme publications). For your consideration, Public Health Scotland provide parents and carers with the following information:

“Formula labelled ‘first milks’ are all you need for your baby’s first year. These are also known as ‘stage 1’ or ‘first stage’ milks. By law, all first milks must include the same ingredients, so a higher price doesn’t mean a better milk and there’s no benefit to spending more than you need to.”[4]

## Step Two: Promote Healthy Start and Best Start Foods schemes

The Healthy Start scheme provides pregnant women or pre-school aged children in low-income households in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland with a weekly payment to spend on healthy foods. Funds can be used to purchase fruit, vegetables, milk and infant formula. These schemes are meant to provide a critical nutritional safety net for the most nutritionally vulnerable, yet many families miss out. Analysis by The Food Foundation identified that 27% of UK households home to children under the age of four experienced food insecurity in January 2023, while only 64% of eligible parents and carers on average access the scheme across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, the equivalent scheme, 'Best Start Foods', was claimed by 88% of eligible parents and carers in 2021-22.[5]

One of your competitors, Iceland, have already taken action to increase awareness of the scheme: 81 million of their own brand milk bottles advertise the Healthy Start scheme in England, and a second phase of the campaign will also see Healthy Start and Best Start Foods promoted on 100 million packs of frozen fruit and vegetables over the next two years. Thus, we request that you offer information on Best Start and Healthy Start schemes in your marketing and communication materials, and in store or on own branded products where possible.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to consider the above. We would be pleased to hear back from you, at your earliest convenience, with any questions you might have about these proposals, and confirmation as to whether you would explore introducing these measures across your stores to support customers who are struggling to meet the rising cost of infant formula.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Erin Williams, Dr Rosie McNee, Co-Founder and Director, Feed  
Clare Murphy, Chief Executive, BPAS  
Justine Roberts, Founder and CEO, Mumsnet  
Angela McConville, CEO, NCT  
Joeli Brearley, Founder and Director, Pregnant Then Screwed  
Diana Nammi, Executive Director, IKWRO- Women's Rights Organisation  
Danielle Flecher-Horn, Founder and CEO, AberNecessities  
Sally Etheridge IBCLC, Director, Leicester Mammias CIC  
Sophie Livingstone, CEO, Little Village  
Ian and Susan Sutherland, Treasurer and Chairperson, Moray Baby Bank  
Catherine D'Albertanson, CEO, Little Green Sock Project  
Emilie de Bruin, Chair, Hartlepool Baby Bank  
Claire Camp, Coordinator, Stockton Baby Bank  
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Professor Kevin Fenton CBE PrFPH PhD, President, Faculty of Public Health  
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Elizabeth Mackenzie, West Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership, Clinical Nurse Manager Health Visiting & Immunisations, Howden Health Centre  
Ben Farrugia, Director, Social Work Scotland  
Ann Bruce, South Cumbria Breastfeeding Support  
Alison Thewliss MP, Member of Parliament for Glasgow Central and Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Infant Feeding and Inequalities  
Monica Lennon, Labour MSP for Central Scotland, Chair of Scottish Government Cross Party Group on Women's Health and Member of Scottish Government Cross Party Group on Poverty

Please send all correspondence to [katherine.o'brien@bpas.org](mailto:katherine.o'brien@bpas.org)

[1] [Access to infant formula for babies living in food poverty in the UK](#), Feed, May 2022

[2] [Desperate parents are stealing baby formula to keep their children fed](#), Sky News, May 2023

[3] [Marketing of infant milk in the UK: what do parents see and believe?](#), First Steps Nutrition Trust, 2020

[4] [Feeding your baby formula milk safely](#), Parent Club Scotland, accessed May 2023

[5] [Government misses target on Healthy Start uptake as 27% of households with children under four face food insecurity](#), The Food Foundation, April 2023