

Guidance for Providing Breastfeeding Support in General Population and Medical Needs Shelters

General guidance:

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on breastfeeding in a General Population and/or Medical Needs Shelter (Shelters).

Even in emergencies, breastfeeding is the safest way to feed infants and young children as it provides infants and children with a safe source of water and food as well as protection against infection. Breastfeeding women continue to lactate during times of physical and emotional stress, but support is critical. Breastfeeding women should be encouraged to take time to feed the baby at the breast if possible, as optimal human milk supply is maintained by infant demand and frequent feedings. If a woman has stopped breastfeeding, she may be able to relactate if formula is difficult to obtain. See resource list.

SC Code Section 63-5-40 states that a woman may breastfeed her child in any location where the mother and her child are authorized to be, and that breastfeeding in a location where the mother is authorized to be must not be considered indecent exposure.

DHEC has lactation consultants (IBCLCs - International Board-Certified Lactation Consultants) available to assist and support breastfeeding women with any breastfeeding issues that may arise during their stay in a DHEC emergency shelter.

Guidelines and procedures for supporting breastfeeding women in shelters:

1. All shelter staff should be trained on the importance of continued breastfeeding during emergencies. Training information is available in the MNS Shelter Packet/Kit or Red Cross Shelter/Nurse Kit.
2. Staff should be informed of South Carolina law which states that a woman may breastfeed her child in any location where the mother and her child are authorized to be, and it must not be considered indecent exposure. If the mother desires a private place to breastfeed, one should be provided.
3. It is recommended that breastfeeding mothers who are considering weaning their infant or introducing bottles delay until the danger has passed.
4. Shelter personnel will use the SC IBCLC LACTATION EMERGENCY SHELTER TRIAGE flowsheet to screen all breastfeeding women.

A. If the need is in a General Population Shelter, then the Nurse Manager at Red Cross Headquarters should through the External Relations AD at HQ's, contact the Red Cross contact in ESF-6 at the SEOC and provide the Nurse Manager contact information. ESF-6 will reach out to ESF-8 in the SEOC and they will subsequently contact the ACC where the call will be directed to the appropriate Regional Coordination Center (RCC). Each region will maintain a rotation schedule of IBCLCs to be on call each time the

shelters are opened. A list of all IBCLCs and their contact information will also be available if needed, as well as other resources.

B. If the need is in a Medical Needs Shelter and a referral to a lactation consultant is indicated, the IBCLC on the rotation should be contacted. Each region will maintain a rotation schedule of IBCLCs to be on call each time the shelters are opened. A list of all IBCLCs and their contact information will also be available if needed, as well as other resources.

5. Because of logistical challenges during emergencies, breastfeeding consultations will be done virtually whenever feasible via phone or laptop using Microsoft Teams. The person on call must have access to one of these resources at all times during their rotation. A hotspot on a cell phone may be used to provide internet access if needed.

Resources:

SC Breastfeeding Coalition <https://www.scbreastfeeds.org/involved>

South Carolina La Leche League <https://www.llofsc.com/>

Zipmilk.org <https://www.zipmilk.org/states/south-carolina>

Baby Friendly Hospitals

<https://www.babyfriendlyusa.org/for-parents/baby-friendly-facilities-by-state/>

Office of Women’s Health: Your Guide to Breastfeeding

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/files/documents/your-guide-to-breastfeeding.pdf>