

Donating infant formula? Please read these notes.

I have seen in photos and notes that some clubs have donated infant formula to individuals and / or organisations.

The donation of infant formula and follow on formula is a very sensitive issue, in South Africa and globally. Years ago when infant formula was first developed the manufacturers donated product to new mothers, who used the product to feed their babies. Their breastmilk then dried up (a physiological reaction when the mother does not feed frequently), but the donated formula also dried up. The mothers who could not afford to buy formula would then over dilute it, or used home made mixtures that did not supply adequate nutrition. Another problem that was encountered was that some mothers were not able to prepare the formula hygienically and the formula fed babies developed severe diarrhoea.

The 'Regulations relating to Foodstuffs for Infants and Young Children' (GNR 991) were published in December 2012 to prevent in appropriate marketing of foods for infants, in particular formula. It is permissible to donate (or provide at low cost) to hospices, orphanages or places of safety.

The Regulations seem to be written assuming that the only group possibly donating formula will be the manufacturers. However in the spirit of the regulations I recommend that Lions Clubs should try to ensure that donations that are made do not undermine breastfeeding.

So, for example:

1. During the riots and unrest in July 2021 people who were already formula feeding did not have access to formula because they could not travel and / or the shops had no stock. In cases such as these I recommend that the product is sold by the club to the mother and the money is placed in the project account.
2. Babies' homes, foster mothers etc. who request donated product at any time may receive it.
3. Mothers who should be breastfeeding, but have chosen not to, should not be given donated product. During ante-natal care they would have been told about the cost of formula feeding, and should only have stopped breastfeeding if they knew they had the money, time and other resources needed to formula feed. They should be referred to their clinic for evaluation, and assistance with re-lactation.

There is no need for babies to receive follow on formula, this is a marketing gimmick of the companies to extend the visibility of their brand. Starter formula with well planned complementary feeding provides all the nutrients that a baby needs from 6 months to 12 months. Cows' milk can be used after 12 months.

Please contact me if you have questions or would like to discuss this further.

Carol Browne

District Chair Hunger Alleviation.