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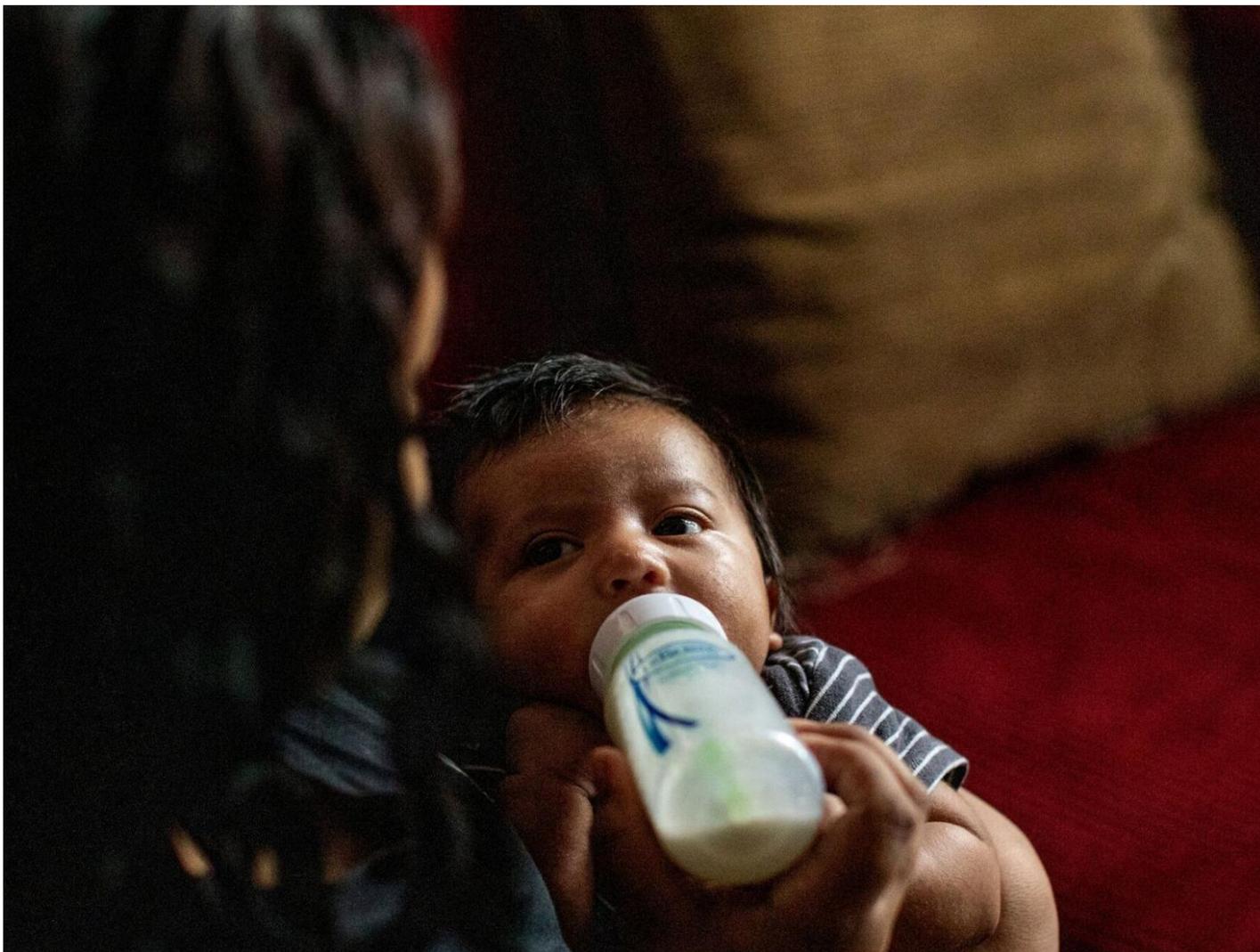
Health Matters

Feed the Babies Project fighting infant formula shortage

Offering relief to local families

The St. Louis American staff

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Nurses for Newborns is assisting nearly 200 families unable to feed their babies due to the formula shortage, a crisis in which people with low incomes and people of color are disproportionately affected.

USDA projections indicate that solutions to get store shelves restocked with formula it may take as long as 10 weeks for store shelves to be replenished.

The St. Louis Integrated Health Network (IHN) and a host of partners have launched the Feed the Babies Project, a community-wide collaborative designed to address the formula shortage crisis and provide solutions for families.

The project will address three priorities:

Breastfeeding Support for Birthing People and Families

While breastfeeding presents a safe and beneficial alternative (or complement) to infant formula, it is not always possible. Local doulas through the Missouri Community Doula Council and certified lactation counselors will support efforts to encourage, educate, and support breastfeeding for those who can.

“As we shed light on the difficulties, we must make sure that the solutions and the possibilities are readily accessible and tangible for Black families. We want to make sure that the challenges aren’t so daunting, that we don’t plant these seeds of hopeless, traumatic experiences,” said Okunsola M. Amadou, Jamaa Birth Village founder and CEO and Missouri Community Doula Council member.

“This partnership with the Feed the Babies Project will really help us to offer these solutions to our community. So many families have been affected by the infant formula shortage and time is of the essence. We look forward to providing equitable resources for breastfeeding counseling/support to many families in need.”

A George Mason University study released June 20, 2022, concludes that the percentage of white babies who receive all their food from breast milk during their first four months of life is double the percentage for African American babies.

Distribution of Pasteurized Donor Human Milk (PDHM)

The second priority is for infants 0-6 months who are in families where breastfeeding is not an option. There will be mass purchasing and storage of PDHM to be distributed to St. Louis families in need.

“The Milk Bank is proud to partner with the Feed the Babies Project to provide immediate relief for families during the formula shortage crisis. This collaboration is an expansion of our work to give babies their best chance to survive and thrive,” said Freedom Kolb, The Milk Bank executive director.

“We are inspired by infant health partners rallying to provide solutions and the amazing milk donors for providing the gift of health and life.”

Nutrition Support, Counseling for Families

The third priority focuses on families with infants from 6 months to 12 months. These families will receive nutrition counseling and support that will provide alternatives to infant formula.

“Feeding babies donor breast milk from human milk banks that take voluntary steps to screen milk donors, and safely collect, process, handle, test, and store the milk is a safe alternative for those that aren’t able to produce enough of their own breast milk, or for those impacted by the current formula shortage. Nutrition and breastfeeding counseling are also highly recommended during this crisis,” said Dr. Maya Moody, Missouri Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics president-elect.

“Call your pediatrician or primary care provider to discuss any questions or concerns that you may have.”

The St. Louis Area Food Bank and Operation Food Search are collecting donations of unused, unexpired rice cereal, baby foods, and infant formula to give away at Feed the Babies distribution events.

The St. Louis Area Diaper Bank will also participate in the community events to provide access to diapers for families in need. They will also accept diaper donations to distribute to their 60+ partners agencies and organizations who serve families in the St. Louis Region.

A capital campaign is underway to raise funds for the project. The purchase and storage of PDHM will make up a substantial portion of the costs to provide this service to families in St. Louis. The campaign’s fiscal sponsor will be the Deaconess Foundation. The IHN will manage the other components of the campaign.

"Our mission at the St. Louis Integrated Health Network is to ensure everyone in our community has the potential to achieve healthy outcomes, especially the medically underserved. This collaborative will provide timely and equitable access to pasteurized human breastmilk and formula during the shortage crisis in the St. Louis area," said Andwele Jolly, St. Louis Integrated Health Network CEO.

Jesse Davis, MD, MBA, senior clinical advisor for infant and maternal health Initiatives at BJC Healthcare Community Health Improvement, is the project lead manager.

Additional partners in the collaboration include Deaconess Foundation, St. Louis Regional Health Commission, Missouri Foundation for Health, BJC HealthCare, Lutheran Foundation of St. Louis, The Milk Bank, Missouri Community Doula Council, Missouri Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics, St. Louis Area Foodbank, Operation Food Search, SSM Health, St. Louis Metropolitan Hospital Council (MHA), March of Dimes, Nurses for Newborns, Affinia Healthcare, Betty Jean Kerr People's Health Centers, CareSTL Health, Family Care Health Centers, Missouri WIC, and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services.

To learn more about this initiative, visit www.feedthebabiesproject.com.