



World Breastfeeding Protection Day

Statement

Powdered Infant Formula Is Not Sterile

BPNI Calls for Urgent Public Health Action

21st May 2026: The Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India ([BPNI](#)), a 35-year-old non-profit organisation working to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding in India and part of [the International Baby Food Action Network \(IBFAN\)](#), expresses serious concern over the ongoing global recalls of powdered infant formula linked to contamination with harmful bacteria and toxins.

Over the years, intrinsic contamination of commercially manufactured formula, often misleadingly marketed, has led to infant deaths, factory closures, interrupted supplies and distress to families. The recent detection of contamination since November 2025 has resulted in ongoing recalls across more than 130 countries and judicial inquiries into infant deaths in France.

These [international recalls](#) across multiple countries have once again highlighted an important but insufficiently communicated public health fact: powdered infant formula is not a sterile product. [Intrinsic contamination](#) of powdered formula can occur with organisms such as Salmonella species, Cronobacter sakazakii (formerly Enterobacter sakazakii) and Clostridium botulinum, and [Bacillus cereus and others](#). Such contamination may occur during manufacturing, either from the production environment or from raw ingredients. Such contamination [can cause life-threatening infections](#) and severe illnesses, including sepsis and meningitis, particularly in preterm, low-birth-weight, and immunocompromised infants.

Ensuring the safety of infant feeding requires strong prevention measures. A sizable number of babies in our country are fed with the powdered infant milk substitutes and infant foods. NFHS – 5 revealed that 9.1% of babies in the breastfeeding group and 13.9% of babies in the non-breastfeeding group received infant formula. According to [an estimate](#), the Indian Baby Food and Infant Formula Market is valued at INR 205 billion.

The key question is whether there should be stronger controls for the safe manufacture of all powdered milk foods for infants and young children and systems for communicating their risks to India's youngest citizens. The World Health Assembly and WHO/FAO guidance have for many years recognized these risks and advised countries to ensure that health workers and caregivers are clearly informed about safe preparation, handling, and storage of powdered infant formula.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Commission are working together to ensure a coordinated and effective response to this issue.



On the occasion of World Breastfeeding Protection Day, BPNI calls upon the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to urgently take the lead and institute the following steps in the interest of infant health and feeding safety:

1. Develop a national guidance specifically on the use of powdered infant formula based on WHO guidance on safe preparation, storage, handling, and disposal of powdered infant formula feeds. Ensure that caregivers are clearly informed that powdered infant formula is not sterile including instructions for hygienic preparation and immediate discarding of leftover prepared feeds.
2. Mandate clear front-of-pack statements that powdered infant milk substitutes and infant food products are not sterile.
3. Develop and strengthen systems for surveillance, public alerts, and rapid response related to contamination and recalls of infant feeding products.
4. Since misleading marketing prevails in India and leads to unnecessary use of powdered formula in the hospitals, effectively enforce the Infant Milk Substitutes, Feeding Bottles, and Infant Foods (Regulation of Production, Supply and Distribution) Act 1992, and Amendment Act 2003 (IMS Act) so that unnecessary use of formula is curtailed.
5. Issue an immediate advisory to all health facilities (both public and private), and health professionals/associations regarding these risks.

BPNI reiterates that breastfeeding remains the safest and most reliable source of infant nutrition, therefore, protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding should be considered an essential public health and infant feeding safety measure.

Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI)

www.bpni.org

Notes:

1. WHA Resolution 58.32 (2005) on risks associated with powdered infant formula.
2. WHA Resolution 61.20 (2008) endorsing WHO/FAO guidance on safe preparation and handling of powdered infant formula.
3. WHO/FAO Guidelines on Safe Preparation, Storage and Handling of Powdered Infant Formula (2007).
4. Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India & Baby Milk Action. (2026). *The infant formula crisis*. www.babymilkaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/FINALFolder-THE-INFANT-FORMULA-CRISIS-18MAY2026-FINAL.pdf