



Donated breast milk is pooled in containers before it is pasteurized and tested for nutritional content at Northwest Mothers Milk Bank in Tigard. PHOTOS BY ABIGAIL DOLLINS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Community steps in to help during formula shortage

Whitney Woodworth

Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

A nationwide shortage has left parents and caregivers searching for formula or breast milk to feed their babies — and those in the Salem area are not exempt from the bare grocery store shelves and delayed shipments faced by millions.

The crisis was triggered by the safety-related closure of Abbott Nutrition's formula-making plant in Michigan in February. Supplies dwindled and eventually led to federal intervention.

At one point in May, 43% of popular formula brands were sold out across the country.

On Mid-Willamette Valley Facebook groups, moms are pleading for leads on certain brands of formulas. Others are offering their own pumped breast milk or stashes of formula. One woman wrote of needing cans of Neocate, a brand specially formulated for babies with certain allergies.

"We were expecting our delivery on Friday, but due to the nationwide shortage, it has been delayed," she said in the group. "It's supposed to be processed today, but I have no idea if we will actually receive it today. We have about one-third of a can left."

Others post pictures of grocery store shelves to alert those in need of what's available. Some offered to donate hundreds of ounces of extra breast milk.

Pediatricians have advised against informal or internet-sharing of breast milk, citing concerns over contamination or exposure to medications, but milk from regulated donor banks is an option for some parents.

Several non-profits and public health agencies are also stepping in to help families feed their hungry babies.

Northwest Mothers Milk Bank, the only nonprofit human milk bank in the Pacific Northwest, reported a surge in people wanting to donate during the formula shortage.

"Our calls from moms interested in donating have increased in the last month by about 300%," said Joanne Ransom, the clinical director of the Northwest Mothers Milk Bank.

The organization accepts breast milk donations after donors pass health screenings and undergo blood tests.

They then pasteurize and test the milk at their Tigard facility before distributing it to hospitals and families in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Alaska. They prioritize providing donated milk to vulnerable populations such as premature infants.

Studies have shown that human milk can be vital to keeping premature, low-birth infants healthy and help prevent deadly complications like necrotizing enterocolitis.

But despite trolls online urging people to "just breastfeed" to avoid the problems with the formula shortage, not every birthing person is physically, emotionally or financially able to breastfeed.

Donor milk first goes to hospitals but is available to parents and caregivers with a prescription for donor milk.

How to help

Donations can be made at Food Share's office/warehouse at 1660 Salem Industrial Drive NE, dropped in a donation barrel at one of several Community Donation Partner sites or at their local pantry.

A list and map of partner pantries is available at marionpolkfoodshare.org/get-help.

Those wishing to donate or find out more about Northwest Mothers Milk Bank can visit online at donatemilk.org or call 503-469-0955.

Marion County WIC can be contacted at 503-588-5057 and online at co.marion.or.us/HLT/PH/WIC.

Ransom said there was about a 40% increase in hospital requests in the past month. Requests from parents have gone up as well.

"Our hearts hurt with the families that are struggling," she said. "We really want to help if we can. We are really just one small non-profit, but families can reach out to us with any questions."

With three times as many calls coming in, Ransom said she is touched by the sheer number of moms wanting to donate their time and hard-pumped milk to those in need.

"That's the silver lining ... that moms are realizing they can help and they can do something about this and they can help another family in their community," Ransom said.

Sam Tenney, spokesman for Marion-Polk Food Share, said they are not actively sourcing or purchasing formula for their partner pantries due to the risk of compounding the shortage.

"Though baby formula is in high demand and our pantries do offer it when it's made available through donations, most SNAP and WIC participants rely on grocery stores and other retailers for their formula," he said. "We don't want to worsen the shortage by asking the community to donate formula."

Instead, the organization is following Oregon Health Authority and Women, Infants and Children program guidance to advise that parents and caregivers contact their pediatricians for recommended alternatives that may still be available.

People who receive their formula through WIC can use their WIC EBT benefits to purchase alternative formulas during the shortage.

"For community members that would like to help households with infants, we are encouraging that they donate other high-demand items like baby food, diapers, pull-ups, and wipes," Tenney said.

Anybody that has unopened, unexpired formula that they don't need, including formula samples sent in the mail, is encouraged to donate it either directly to the Food Share or to their local pantry.

For questions, comments and news tips, email reporter Whitney Woodworth at wwoodworth@statesmanjournal.com, call 503-910-6616 or follow on Twitter @wwoodworth.

Coaching for any size business

Brandon Steinman

Chemeketa Small Business Development Center

The business environment is rough right now: inflation, supply chain problems, changing policies and the war on talent just to name a few.

In the talent marketplace, a lot has been discussed about hiring the right candidates, and justly so, as it is difficult to find good productive talent.

But what about retaining your employees? Retaining is an often overlooked yet vitally important part of having a successful business.

When you are thinking of ways to keep your employees, personal and professional growth can be a great incentive for an employee to stay with you.

But who has the time or resources to worry about developing your employees in the chaos of business?

I would recommend a simple approach to coaching.

This approach can be done quickly and with minimum preparation, but the impact can be huge.

Focus on two questions: What are you doing well on the job and what are you working on improving?

The most important part of coaching is to listen and be supportive.

Let your employee share openly and encourage them to be honest about what they believe they are doing well and where they would like to grow and learn.

The important work for you to do to prepare for a coaching conversation is to remember your employee's previous responses and after asking the questions, let them steer the conversation.

The steps for a successful coaching session and items to consider would look like this:

- Share with your employee that you are interested in their professional growth and would like to start coaching them.

- If they agree, tell them what they share is important to you and that you will be supportive.

- Create an open and friendly atmosphere where your employee feels safe to share what they are thinking.

- Ask them what they believe they are doing well on the job. Tone matters! Make sure they understand this is not a threatening question where they must defend their job performance, but rather an opportunity for them to consider the work they do and what they believe they are good at.

- Make sure to listen. Listening, by which I mean shut up, deserves its own step in coaching. You should provide affirmation as your employee is sharing such as "Tell me more" or "I agree" or "You are great at that!" Arguing about whether what they do is good or not will kill the positive impact of coaching.

- When your employee is done sharing what they do well, follow up with a question like "What are you working on improving" or "What would you like to get better at" or "What work skill would you like to improve."

- Once again, let them lead the direction of the conversation. Only provide direction if they share a skill growth goal totally off the wall like juggling while riding a unicycle.

- Throughout the process, refrain from providing judgment. Coaching should be a positive experience for everyone involved, and it can only be positive if you approach the interaction with a positive mindset. We all start at different levels of competence, so even if your employee says they do a task well that you know they actually struggle with, keep encouraging them!

Coaching can lead to the growth of your employee, retention of key talent, and impact your bottom line.

I have found great success in coaching employees and I hope you do, too!

Brandon Steinman is a Business Adviser at the Chemeketa Small Business Development Center. The Small Business Adviser column is produced by the center. Questions can be submitted to sbdc@chemeketa.edu.

The most important part of coaching is to listen and be supportive.

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Credit recovery

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at risk of not moving up to the next grade should be evaluated for special needs or remedial credit work.

How does credit recovery work?

There may be several options for a student looking for a second shot at a class they couldn't complete and who needs help to graduate, including an in-person, online or a blended learning approach.

Some schools offer credit recovery through their district programs. Other providers, like community colleges, also offer similar programs. A big benefit of credit recovery is the variety and flexibility they offer. Students can work during normal school hours, after school, during school breaks and at night in school computer labs.

The most common credit recovery option is summer school. Additionally, the pandemic caused some students to fall behind, so taking a summer class has the bonus of keeping adolescent brains ready to learn in the fall.

How can parents help their students?

Parents can help their children be successful with credit recovery by researching options and being supportive. Before your family is ready to sign up for any credit recovery classes, talk with your student's counselor to ensure the course will earn credit for their high school transcript.

When evaluating credit recovery provided by the school district or any alternatives, parents should check reviews from other families and find out if the programs are certified. Not all online programs are the same, so parents should ask if instructors are available to answer questions and offer accountability.

There's often been a stigma attached to these courses, especially during the summer, leaving students feeling ashamed. Parents should emphasize to their children that struggling in one area doesn't make them a failure. Instead, focus on how brave they are and what they can learn from this experience.

What are the benefits of credit recovery?

Credit recovery empowers students to continue their education and graduate. In addition to picking up lost credits, these classes often expose students to new ways of learning.

For students struggling to stay in school, a positive credit recovery experience might increase self-esteem, improve academics and also be a turning point in their attitude toward learning.

Taking credit recovery classes during the summer or at night during the school year doesn't sound like fun, but getting a high school diploma opens doors for young people. Students considering credit recovery this summer might think about Robert Frost, valedictorian and "class poet" of his high school graduation class. Frost put it best; "Education is hanging around until you've caught on."

Brye Murphy is a Math Teacher at Willamette Connections Academy, which is now enrolling for the 2022-23 academic year. Visit WillametteConnectionsAcademy.com or call (800) 382-6010.