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For cascade to:
General Practitioners
Practice Nurses
Health Visitors
Hospital Midwives
Community Pharmacists
Community Midwives

23 January 2013

Dear Colleague

Preparation of infant formula

We are aware that there has been some recent public debate about the preparation of infant formula using water below a temperature of 70°C. This is a concern as our precautionary approach sets out best practice and aims to minimise the risks to infants. This is why we, the Chief Medical Officer and Director for Public Health Nursing in England, are writing to health professionals to raise awareness of this important issue and to restate existing guidance.

We would like to reiterate that the position of the Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency is that it is best practice to make up infant feeds by reconstituting formula powder using water at a temperature of 70°C or above. This guidance is in line with World Health Organisation recommendations and aims to ensure that the potential microbiological risks associated with these products are kept to a minimum. Using water at this temperature will kill harmful pathogens if they are present in the non-sterile powdered formula as well as helping reduce the risk of contamination which may occur in the home (e.g. due to poor hygiene practices or feeding equipment which has not been sterilised adequately).

We know from the Infant Feeding Survey (2010)¹ that almost half of all mothers, who had prepared powdered infant formula in the last seven days, had followed all three recommendations for making up feeds (only making one feed at a time, making feeds within 30 minutes of the water boiling and adding the water to the bottle before the powder). Of those surveyed 7 out of 10 mothers met the requirement to make up feeds within 30 minutes of the water boiling. This is an increase of 12% from the previous survey and is a testament to the information you are providing to parents – we do not want to lose this impetus.

However, we want to be clear that all standard, non-specialised infant formula and follow on formulas, including those containing probiotics, should be prepared in-line with current best practice, regardless of the presence of any other contrary instruction on the product, in order to minimise the risk of infection. Whilst the likelihood of infection may be low, we need to maintain our vigilance as the consequences of the presence of harmful pathogenic bacteria can be serious, and in some cases fatal, for those affected.

It is therefore appropriate that we are all mindful of our precautionary approach to the preparation of powdered infant and follow on formula. You can find further advice at:

http://www.nhs.uk/start4life/Documents/PDFs/Start4Life_Guide_to_bottle_feeding.pdf

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby/pages/making-up-infant-formula.aspx>

We express our gratitude for your cooperation with this matter.



Professor Dame Sally C Davies
Chief Medical officer and
Chief Scientific Adviser



Viv Bennett
Director for Public Health Nursing

¹ <https://catalogue.ic.nhs.uk/publications/public-health/surveys/infant-feed-surv-2010/ifs-uk-2010-chap5-milk-other-than-brmilk.pdf>