

U.S. government extends baby formula waivers, rebates for WIC families

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To help parents who use government nutrition benefits cope with an

ongoing shortage of baby formula, U.S. federal officials will extend a program giving them more choice at the grocery store.

Families who buy [formula](#) through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC) will be able to buy substitutes for their regular formula through Dec. 31—or for 60 days after their state's emergency declaration ends, *CNN* reported.

That [flexibility](#) was set to expire in late September. WIC accounts for about 50% of all the formula purchased in the United States, *CNN* noted.

In granting continued flexibility, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) said in a statement that it recognizes that families still can't find the brands and sizes their food benefits allow them to buy.

A nationwide recall of baby formula and the shutdown of a major manufacturing plant triggered [the shortage](#) earlier this year.

Abbott Nutrition, whose closed plant was largely responsible for [the shortage](#), said it would cover the cost for families that needed to buy alternative formulas. Abbott supplies formula to WIC programs in 40 U.S. states and territories.

Abbott will reimburse states the cost of purchasing alternative brands through Oct. 31, Abbott spokesman John Koval told *CNN*.

Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in a news release that the USDA recognizes that "the flexibilities provided by these waivers remain necessary as we continue to pull every lever to address [infant formula supply issues](#) and provide certainty for families."

Brian Dittmeier, senior director of public policy with the National WIC Association, urged manufacturers to match the USDA's extension.

"USDA's steps to provide States with longer-term clarity must be matched by clear commitments from infant formula manufacturers to ensure that WIC families will have continued access to additional options until supply of contract formulas and consumer confidence in those products are restored," he told *CNN*.

More information: The U.S. Department of Agriculture has information about eligibility and applying for the [WIC program](#)

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