



Government's baby steps on addressing the formula market welcome, but stronger actions are warranted

Press release

For immediate release

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We welcome the long-awaited response from the UK Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and devolved nations to the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) 11 recommendations on the formula milk market.

Published more than 9 months ago, these recommendations were issued in response to concerns about unjustifiably high formula prices (which persist to dateⁱ), and parents having to make choices based on incomplete and unclear information, because of widespread misleading marketing.

The CMA described that *"Taken as a whole, our package of mutually reinforcing measures aims to fundamentally alter the dynamics of competition in the infant formula market to bring about better outcomes for parents in general in terms of the choices they feel able to make and prices they pay for infant formula"*

The Baby Feeding Law Group UK and First Steps Nutrition Trust support the Government's response to the CMA's recommendations as a small but positive step toward enabling families who use formula to feed their babies, to make more informed and affordable choices. **The Governments of the four nations must now act swiftly to implement and evaluate the effectiveness of the agreed measures while preparing to strengthen legislation and enforcement in line with the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly Resolutions. Stronger, enforced marketing regulations are essential to protect the health of all infants and young children, however they are fed, and to meet the Government's promise to give all children the best start in life.**

Government focuses on supporting more informed choices by parents

We are pleased to see that the Government accepts in principle the recommendation to ensure clearer, accurate, impartial information on the nutritional sufficiency of all first infant formulas in healthcare and retail settings. These actions are necessary to challenge the formula industry's marketing and pricing practices which mislead parents into believing that more expensive equals better. The nutritional composition of all first infant formulas is tightly regulated, meaning all can support adequate growth and development for babies who are not fully breastfed, and no one product imparts benefits over any other.

Coupling improved information provision with improved product placement in shops and online is also a welcome move. Unnecessary and under-regulated, sugar-filled products like growing-up milks and drinks need to be taken out of the spotlight, both to protect infant health and save families from unnecessary expenditureⁱⁱ.

The rejection of the recommendation to implement standardised labelling of infant formula provided via the NHS is a missed opportunity to eliminate brand influence in the most vulnerable early days of a baby's life.

Government pushes strengthening formula labelling and advertising rules into the long grass and under-commits on enforcement

The Government has agreed that clarification of what constitutes advertising is needed and is supportive of ensuring that parents can use gift cards, vouchers, loyalty points and coupons in lieu of cash to purchase infant formula. While both measures are welcomed, it is vital to understand that vouchers and coupons are not an equitable or meaningful solution to the unaffordability of infant formula by families on the lowest incomes. This action is also not what struggling families themselves would prioritiseⁱⁱⁱ.

The Government accepts in principle to assess product labels and communicate necessary changes to manufacturers and enforcers to ensure compliance. This is vital to clamp down on flagrant disregard for labelling regulations across products and brands^{iv, v}. However, without accepting and acting on the recommendation for pre-authorisation of formula labels, we are concerned the status quo will remain.

We are very disappointed that much needed action to strengthen the legislation on labelling and advertising and improve enforcement has been deprioritised in the short term. In effect it means the Government is putting the onus on parents to navigate choices in the context of ubiquitous, aggressive marketing which a wealth of research has shown undermines safe and appropriate infant

feeding and drives the purchase of expensive and unnecessary products^{vi}, ^{vii}. However good the information parents receive, it will continue to be drowned out by marketing unless this is reined in.

Stronger, mandatory marketing restrictions on all formula milks, including unnecessary follow-on formulas and growing up/toddler milks and drinks, are needed to level the playing field across the formula industry and to properly enable all parents to make informed decisions on what and how they feed their babies.

Government restates its commitment to supporting babies, new parents and carers to eat well

We warmly welcome the Government contextualising its recommendations on the formula market in its ongoing commitment to supporting breastfeeding. We also appreciate its acknowledgement of the vital role of the national nutritional safety net schemes, Healthy Start and Best Start Foods, to support the most vulnerable mothers, infants and young children to access nutritious diets.

We urge the Government to ensure long-term, dependable and sufficient funding for quality-assured breastfeeding and infant feeding support and to make improvements to the Healthy Start scheme to ensure it is sufficiently impactful^{viii}.

Dr Vicky Sibson, Director of First Steps Nutrition Trust, said:

"Our government has committed to giving all children the best start in life. This makes it essential to ensure adequate protection, promotion and support for breastfeeding and safe and appropriate formula feeding where needed. Today's response to the CMA recommendations represents baby steps in the right direction. Parents who use formula to feed their babies could benefit from clearer, impartial information to guide and empower them to choose the infant formulas out there that are more affordable. But unless regulations on marketing covering all formula milks are strengthened and enforced, they will be continually bombarded with advertising which undermines these efforts. In addition, the rejection of the recommendation to implement standardised labelling of infant formula provided via the NHS is a missed opportunity to eliminate brand influence in the most vulnerable early days of a baby's life".

Dr Katie Pereira-Kotze, Secretariat of the Baby Feeding Law Group UK, said:

"We welcome the Government's considered response to the CMA recommendations, and its positioning in the context of comprehensive breastfeeding and infant feeding support. It is essential

that parents who use formula to feed their babies are better informed that all first infant formulas are nutritionally equivalent, so they are confident to go for whatever lower cost options are available. However, placing the onus on parents to make better choices and shop around is a concerning focus of the Government's response. In the current environment, where any evidence-based information from health professionals gets drowned out by misleading marketing, it will remain vital to prioritise strengthening legislation governing the marketing of all formula milks, and to enforce it properly. This is necessary to protect all babies; however they are fed. While the government has indicated willingness to consider this in future, we feel more urgency and clear timeline commitments for this are required. Lastly, unless persistently high infant formula prices come down considerably in the future, Government-led controls may well be warranted".

Amy Brown, Professor of Maternal and Child Health at Swansea University said:

"It is excellent that the government realises the seriousness of the issue of high formula prices and is starting to take some action. Our research has shown the devastating impact not being able to afford formula milk for your baby has upon parent wellbeing and safe feeding practices. Supporting more informed infant formula product choices and reducing the impact of marketing are important, but it is vital that further steps are taken to ensure affordable access for all. Our research shows that although loyalty points and offers are appreciated by and make a small difference for some parents, they will not help everyone, especially those on the lowest incomes who shop at places where points are not available. Parents in our research called for cheaper formula prices in the first place, knowing that loyalty points and offers can be unreliable, often support those with more money to spend and rarely work in the best interests of the consumer. It is imperative that the more pertinent issues of over pricing and increased profits are tackled as these are what are maintaining high prices".

For media enquiries, interviews, or further comments, please contact:

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Notes to editors

- [First Steps Nutrition Trust](#) is an independent public health nutrition charity providing evidence-based information on infant feeding and early years nutrition. We provide the only independent resource with comprehensive, conflict-of-interest-free information about infant and follow-on

formula in the UK, through our [Infant Milk Info website](#). The website provides an essential, unique, up to date and relevant, alternative source of information on commercial milk formulas that is free from conflicts of interest and supports health workers and parents to make informed feeding decisions. By doing this, we support safe and appropriate formula feeding - such as by using the appropriate products and preparing them correctly AND we contribute to protecting breastfeeding and appropriate formula use in UNICEF baby-friendly settings.

- [The Baby Feeding Law Group UK](#) is a coalition of organisations working to protect infant and maternal health by ending marketing practices that commercialise infant feeding, mislead consumers and threaten breastfeeding or safe formula feeding.
- The CMA's final report on the Infant formula and follow-on formula market study^{ix} provided 11 recommendations to governments for action to improve outcomes for parents:

Recommendations to governments for action to improve outcomes for parents	
Eliminating brand influence in healthcare settings	Timely, clear, accurate and impartial information on nutritional sufficiency of infant formula products in healthcare settings
	Standardised infant formula labelling in healthcare settings
Equipping parents to make strong choices in retail settings	Clear accurate and impartial information on the nutritional sufficiency of all infant formula products on retail shelves and in online shopping channels
	Display of all brands of infant formula together on retail shelves and in a separate cluster from all brands of other formula milks
Strengthening labelling and advertising rules	Clear, accurate and impartial information on the nutritional sufficiency of all infant formula products on product labelling
	On-pack messaging – prohibiting intangible and/or non-verifiable messages on infant formula and follow-on formula labels
	Extending the restriction on advertising to follow-on formula
	Clarify what constitutes advertising
	Permit the use of gift cards, vouchers, loyalty points and coupons in lieu of cash to purchase infant formula
Effective enforcement	Governments to assess whether infant formula and follow-on formula labels are 'clearly distinct' and communicate assessment to manufacturers and enforcers
	Competent authority to pre-approve product labels

 Implementation via regulatory measures should be preceded by voluntary pilot programmes.

- In July 2025, we published the report [Current formula marketing practices in the UK^x](#) which provides examples (categorised according to the various CMA recommendations) of how formula marketing has intensified and adapted in the wake of the CMA market study and recommendations.
- During April 2025, we shared more detail on this in the BFLG-UK response to the CMA infant and follow-on formula market study^{xi}, and in a summary of global examples and guidance on marketing restrictions for follow-on formula and growing up milks^{xii}.

- Infant formula prices rose by 31% in two years, far exceeding inflation and making formula unaffordable for many families.^{xiii}
- Guidance for parents who use formula to feed their babies on what infant formula to choose can be found here: [Infant-formula-and-responsive-bottle-feeding.pdf](#)
- The National Breastfeeding Helpline number is 0300 100 0212. The line is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year, offering non-judgmental, evidence-based, independent, friendly breastfeeding and infant feeding support and information to anyone in the UK who needs it.

ⁱ FSNT. 2025. Costs of infant formula, follow-on formula and milks marketed as foods for special medical purposes available over the counter in the UK; Trends in the cost of infant formulas in the UK from January 2021 to October 2025. <https://infantmilkinfo.org/costs/> ; www.firststepsnutrition.org/s/Press-release-to-urge-DHSC-to-publish-response-to-CMA-report_20Oct2025final.pdf

ⁱⁱ FSNT. 2025. Drinks for young children marketed as ‘growing up’ and ‘toddler’ milks and drinks. www.firststepsnutrition.org/s/Drinksmarketedastoddlerandgrowingupmilksanddrinks_version-120325.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ ‘Should infant formula be available at UK food banks? Evaluating different pathways to ensuring parents in financial crisis can access infant formula’. Personal communication about preliminary research results from Prof Amy Brown, Swansea University. <https://gtr.ukri.org/projects?ref=MR%2FZ503575%2F1>

^{iv} Kamata, M., Pereira-Kotze, C., Kerac, M. and Sibson, V. (2025), Formula Labelling in the United Kingdom: Manufacturers' Compliance With the Code, UK Law and Guidance Notes. *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, 21: e13794. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mcn.13794>

^v Conway R, Esser S, Steptoe A, Smith AD, Llewellyn C. Content analysis of on-package formula labelling in Great Britain: use of marketing messages on infant, follow-on, growing-up and specialist formula. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2023;26(8):1696-1705. doi:10.1017/S1368980023000216

^{vi} WHO & UNICEF. 2022. How the marketing of formula milk influences our decisions on infant feeding. www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240044609

^{vii} Rollins, et al. 2023. Marketing of commercial milk formula: a system to capture parents, communities, science, and policy. *The Lancet*, Volume 401, Issue 10375, 486 – 502. www.thelancet.com/series/breastfeeding-2023

^{viii} Obesity Health Alliance and First Steps Nutrition Trust, A joint position: Healthy Early Years Diets: Achieving the Best Start in Life, December 2025

^{ix} CMA. 2025. Infant formula and follow-on formula market study final report. www.gov.uk/government/publications/infant-formula-and-follow-on-formula-market-study-final-report

^x FSNT. 2025. Current formula marketing in the UK: Why DHSC should accept the Competition and Markets Authority recommendations in full. www.firststepsnutrition.org/s/FSNT-Current-formula-marketing-tactics-in-the-context-of-the-CMA-report-recommendations_17July2025fi.pdf

^{xi} https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c6bb04a65a70771b7cbc916/t/67f512863d62e156fa2c25b0/1744114312954/BFLG-UK+response+to+the+CMA+infant+and+follow-on+formula+market+study_8Apr2025.pdf

^{xii} www.bflg-uk.org/s/Marketing-restrictions-on-FUF-GUM-BFLG-summary_7Apr2025final.pdf

^{xiii} First Steps Nutrition Trust. 2023. *What the Cost-of-Living Crisis means for the diets of infants and young children and recommended actions*. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59f75004f09ca48694070f3b/t/6462575da539fa597ba486d4/1684166494259/First+Steps+Nutrition+Trust+Cost+of+Living+Briefing+May+2023+final.pdf> (Accessed: 9 September 2025).