



HEALTH ALERT

Contamination Threat Infant Milk Formula

To: West Coast GPs, Practice Nurses, Rural Nurse Specialists, ED staff and other healthcare workers

From: Dr Cheryl Brunton, Medical Officer of Health

In November 2014 Fonterra and Federated Farmers received a threat to contaminate a range of milk formula products, including infant formula, with 1080 (fluoroacetate) if New Zealand did not stop using 1080 by the end of March 2015. The threat was made public on the 10 March 2015, and is being treated as credible. While the threat referred to overseas markets, contamination of domestic markets cannot be ruled out. The threat has been the subject of an extensive Police and MPI investigation, and the Ministry of Health has prepared a package of information for health professionals and the public.

Community and Public Health encourages you to go to the Ministry of Health website www.health.govt.nz, which contains information regarding 1080, the testing regime of milk products implemented by MPI, symptoms of 1080 poisoning for infants, children, and adults, treatment, and reporting suspected 1080 poisoning cases. The website also provides links to specific information for parents and caregivers, general practitioners, Healthline and PlunketLine nurses, midwives, Well Child/Tamariki Ora nurses and dieticians, and hospital level secondary care.

Below are key messages from the Ministry of Health:

INFANT FORMULA

- Infant formula now is as safe as it was before this threat was made
- If your baby is not drinking infant formula they are not at risk from this threat
- Where babies are not breastfed, a properly prepared, commercial infant formula is recommended as the best alternative for babies under one year of age
- Parents using infant formula should check the formula packaging for signs of tampering (www.foodprotection.govt.nz) before using it
- Parents may harm infants by feeding them alternatives to commercial infant formula. Cows' milk should not be given to babies less than 12 months of age. (<https://www.healthed.govt.nz/resource/feeding-your-baby-infant-formula>)
- In some instances women may be able to restart breastfeeding. If you wish to seek advice on this contact PlunketLine 0800 933 922. If you have any concerns you can discuss these with Healthline on 0800 611 116 or PlunketLine 0800 933 922
- Testing by MPI; precautions by retailers; and checks for tampering means the risk of infant or other formulas being contaminated as a result of this threat is very low.

ILL BABY

- If your baby is unwell, but has not consumed infant formula they are not at risk from this threat. You should follow your usual practice, including calling HealthLine, PlunketLine or your general practice for advice
- If you are feeding your baby infant formula and they are well then continue with your feeding practice. If you have concerns, discard the current tin and purchase a new one and confirm it has not been tampered with
- Ministry for Primary Industries advice on the steps you can take to ensure formula is free from contamination can be found on (www.foodprotection.govt.nz) or by contacting PlunketLine 0800 933 922 or Healthline 0800 611 116
- The early symptoms for poisoning related to this threat are similar to those seen in sick infants and adults
- Parents can call PlunketLine if they have concerns about feeding; and Healthline if they have any concerns if their baby being unwell. They will advise on the best course of action to take

TREATMENT

- Anyone poisoned with 1080 will need hospital treatment.

REPORTING

- Health services will promptly report any poisoning to the Medical Officer of Health and the Police
- The system for reporting any suspected cases is already in place, as this is a notifiable condition.

ACTIONS

- The Ministry of Health has been working closely with MPI and Police and has briefed key health agencies about the threat and actions being taken to minimise it
- The Ministry has sought specialist advice to assist with planning for a response to this threat, and to guide advice provided to agencies leading this response
- Testing for poisoning from this threat is now being arranged
- Healthline and PlunketLine have additional resources in place to help manage any additional calls from parents seeking information related to the threat.

While this threat to contaminate infant milk formula is being treated as credible, it is still very unlikely that anyone has been or will be harmed. Please ensure that you check the information sources referred to in this message so that you are able to respond to concerns from your patients.



Dr Cheryl Brunton
Medical Officer of Health