

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00:01 MONDAY 23rd JUNE

PRESS RELEASE

LONDON 23 JUNE 2025

MISLEADING MARKETING AND OVERPRICED MILK: HOW BABY FORMULA COMPANIES ARE EXPLOITING PARENTS – AND GETTING AWAY WITH IT

- ‘Fake science’ on formula and bottles is rampant, while families pay the price for high profits.
- Social media influencers are being paid to promote dubious health benefits – and ads drive misinformation online.
- Leading public health experts call for simple packaging on tins of baby formula to protect parents and carers from misleading claims and misplaced brand loyalty.



CALL TO ACTION: the UK and all devolved governments must fully implement the recent recommendations of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA).

We are calling for stronger protection – now – for families using infant formula. The UK government and all devolved nations must fully implement the 11 CMA recommendations (see Figure 1 below).

A new report on UK infant feeding policies, launched Tuesday 24th June in Parliament, has found:

- **Families using formula are being exploited by companies** with rampant profiteering, high profit margins and misleading advertising. This has been revealed by the CMA (an independent UK government agency responsible for competition regulation and consumer protection in the UK), who launched a market study into infant and follow-on formula in 2024-25 following grocery sector work aimed at addressing cost-of-living pressures. The CMA published its recommendations on the infant formula market to all UK governments in February 2025 –and the UK government has yet to respond or commit to its advice.ⁱ
- **High prices:** Prices for formula have risen sharply and by as much as 47%ⁱⁱ despite a cost-of-living crisis, protecting huge profit margins of between 50-75%ⁱⁱⁱ.
 - Repeated exposés by NGOs such as the Food Foundation^{iv}, First Steps Nutrition Trust^v and in the media have not resulted in serious reductions in prices
- **‘Fake science’ and cross promotion rife despite regulatory guidance:** Gaps in regulations in the marketing of other infant milks, including follow-on, growing up/toddler milks and formulas for special medical purposes,^{vi} allow companies to cross-promote their products. They use misleading claims with no scientific evidence, such as ‘anti colic / comfort’ milks.
- **‘Influencers’ spreading misinformation:** Marketing through social media and digital platforms is unregulated. Many parents are getting information about infant feeding from digital platforms and social media, but too often this information is incorrect; there are no standards to enforce in online spaces. Instagram ‘influencers’ are too often paid to promote baby formula brands carrying these misleading claims.
- **Gaps in monitoring and enforcement:**
 - There is no formal system to monitor existing marketing

- Enforcement is the responsibility of Trading Standards and the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), but this is poorly implemented due to underfunding and lack of capacity. In addition, there are conflicts of interest in some local authorities who have commercial partnerships with the baby feeding industry
- No penalties have been issued in the last 3 years
- **Healthy Start isn't meeting the need:** The value of Healthy Start^{vii} in England is not enough to pay for most infant's supply of formula. This needs to be increased to meet the actual market cost of formula and should be pegged to food prices, while uptake and eligibility should be increased.
- **Safety regulations for feeding equipment are lacking:** Other feeding products such as bottles, teats, and formula preparation devices do not fall under any marketing regulations or standards and lack safety regulations to ensure the safety of infants using them.

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.

Figure 1: The 11 CMA recommendations to governments for action to improve outcomes for parents.

The WBTi report found gaps in multiple other UK policies for families with babies as well, including:

- **Infants and young children are not mentioned** in high level guidance on emergency planning (such as for flooding) in a time of increasing climate crisis
- **Breastfeeding breaks:** There is no statutory provision for lactation breaks for new mothers returning to the workplace – or for childcare settings to accept mothers' expressed milk for their babies; meanwhile statutory pay for maternity, paternity and shared parental leave is substantially lower than minimum wage
- **Inadequate data collection:** many areas in England don't have full local data on infant feeding - and all 4 nations collect different data
- The devolved nations have led the way on policy, but **England still has no national infant feeding policy**, no national leadership or national committee.

Jess Brown-Fuller MP, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Infant Feeding:
"Building the 'healthiest generation ever' starts with protecting families from exploitation. Infant formula is not a luxury – it's a necessity for many parents. Yet formula prices are soaring, driven by misleading marketing, while government inaction leaves vulnerable families struggling. No parent should face stigma or financial hardship for feeding their baby. The CMA has offered clear, sensible reforms: banning false claims, improving labelling and removing brand bias in hospitals. Wes Streeting must act now to implement these changes and ensure every baby gets a fair start, regardless of how they are fed or their family's income."

Patricia Wise, NCT Breastfeeding Counsellor and member of the WBTi UK Steering Group:
"It's appalling how much digital marketing new mothers are exposed to."

Dr Dolly van Tulleken, policy consultant and visiting researcher at Cambridge University's MRC Epidemiology Unit:

"Government policy is failing to protect families with babies from being ripped off and misled by large food corporations – and that must change. The government is currently developing a food strategy and a 10-year plan for health. Both offer perfect windows of opportunity for politicians to put protecting families with babies at the top of their priority list because a healthy, fairer nation makes total economic and political sense."

Alison Morton, CEO Institute for Health Visiting:

"Shopping for infant formula in the UK has become a minefield. The CMA's report lays bare the harsh fact that parents are being exploited by misleading advertising. The industry preys on parents' overriding motivation to do "what is viewed to be best for their baby" – with aggressive corporate marketing tactics motivated by profit, pressurising parents to purchase a higher priced product under the misguided belief that it is better quality. Parents and babies deserve better."

Dr Vicky Sibson, Director First Steps Nutrition Trust:

"Corporate greed is risking child health. All babies deserve the best start in life and its high time the big brand formula companies were held to account to support that becoming a reality. All four nations' Governments accepting and acting on the CMA's recommendations would be a great step in the right direction".

ENDS

NOTES FOR EDITORS

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For more information about the WBTi report:

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The WBTi UK 2024 report is available at <https://ukbreastfeeding.org/wbtiuk2024/>

About the World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative (WBTi)

WBTi UK is a human rights-based, evidence-informed collaborative initiative to galvanise action on infant feeding policy and programmes. The WBTi global project was started by IBFAN (the International Baby Food Action Network) and is based on the WHO Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding and the Innocenti Declaration.

WBTi UK Core Group members

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers (ABM)	Lactation Consultants of Great Britain (LCGB)
Baby Milk Action	La Leche League GB (LLLGB)
Breastfeeding Alliance	Leicester Mammas
Breastfeeding Network (BfN)	Maternity Action
First Steps Nutrition Trust (FSNT)	NCT
GP Infant Feeding Network (GPIFN)	Royal College of Midwives (RCM)
Hospital Infant Feeding Network (HIFN)	UNICEF UK Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI)
Institute of Health Visiting (iHV)	University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN)

WBTi Social media accounts

Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/wbtiuk/about
Instagram	https://www.instagram.com/breastfeeding.wbtiuk/
Bluesky	@wbtiuk.bsky.social / https://bsky.app/profile/wbtiuk.bsky.social

ⁱ a) Competition and Markets Authority (CMA). 2025. *Infant formula and follow-on formula market study: Final report*. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67b5b9cad15c152ea555bf8e/> Final report .pdf

b) CMA. 2025. *Infant formula and follow-on formula market study: Final report Executive summary*: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67b5b9d43e77ca8b737d3884/> Executive Summary .pdf

ⁱⁱ CMA. 2025. *Infant formula and follow-on formula market study: Appendix D: pricing analysis methodology*. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/infant-formula-and-follow-on-formula-market-study-final-report>

ⁱⁱⁱ CMA. 2025. *Infant formula and follow-on formula market study: Final report Executive summary*: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67b5b9d43e77ca8b737d3884/> Executive Summary .pdf

^{iv} Food Foundation. *First infant formula milk update June 2025*. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/first-infant-formula-milk-update-june-2025>

^v a) First Steps Nutrition Trust (FSNT). *Costs of infant formula, follow-on formula and milks marketed as foods for special medical purposes available over the counter in the UK, May 2025*. <https://infantmilkinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Costs-of-IF-FOF-and-milks-marketed-as-FSMP-available-over-the-counter-in-the-UK-May2025.pdf>

b) FSNT. *Trends in the cost of infant formulas in the UK from January 2021 to May 2025*. https://infantmilkinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Summary_of_trends_May-2025final23052025.pdf

^{vi} a) Baby Feeding Law Group (BFLG-UK). 2022. *Infant milks marketed as foods for special medical purposes (FSMP): the case for regulatory reform to protect infant health*. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c6bb04a65a70771b7cbc916/t/638f348264c6ec61b3b0704c/1670329478025/FSN_FSMP+Report_A4_DIGITAL.pdf

b) FSNT & BFLG-UK. 2022. Infographic: *Infant milks marketed as iFSMPs: Did you Know?* <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c6bb04a65a70771b7cbc916/t/6410784e8aa29161ddebd759/1678800975286/Infant+Milks+Marketed+as+Foods+for+Special+Medical+Purposes+%28iFSMPs%29+Did+You+Know+%283%29.pdf>

^{vii} The Food Foundation. 2025. *Strengthening the Health Start scheme to protect children's health*.

<https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/strengthening-healthy-start-scheme-protect-childrens-health>