

SPIRIT OF MEMPHIS

FedEx lends a hand with Operation Fly Formula

By Rob Moore, Daily Memphian

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Pallets of baby formula are transferred to a truck after arriving on an Air Force C-17 in Indianapolis, Sunday, May 22, 2022. The 132 pallets of Nestlé Health Science Alfamino Infant and Alfamino Junior formula arrived from Ramstein Air Base in Germany. (AP Photo/Michael Conroy)

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FedEx Express team members were present Sunday, May 22, as military cargo planes arrived in Indiana carrying around 1.5 million bottles worth of infant formula from Europe.

The White House first announced “Operation Fly Formula” on Thursday, May 19, to speed up the import of infant formula following a national shortage, a result of the closure of an Abbott Labs facility. Abbott makes about 40% of all infant formula sold in the U.S.

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Today, we are transporting critical shipments of baby formula in coordination with the U.S. government to help improve access for parents and families in need.

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“We at FedEx are honored to be called on to use our network in support of this important mission with the U.S. Government,” said Richard W. Smith, president and CEO-elect of FedEx Express. “The lack of access to formula is impacting babies and families across the country, and we are proud to support the distribution of these critical items to deliver hope to those in need.”

Infant formula shortage takes its toll on Mid-South families

The flight from the Ramstein Air Base in Germany to Indiana transported the equivalent of 1.5 million 8-ounce bottles of three formulas, all of which are hypoallergenic for children with cow’s milk protein allergy.

These formulas have been prioritized because they serve a critical medical purpose and are in short supply.

After landing, the formula was then loaded into FedEx semitractor-trailers where it was transported to a Nestlé distribution center in Anderson, Indiana. The White House said Thursday the shipment would include around 246 pallets.

Speaking on CNN’s “State of the Union” Sunday, director of the White House National Economic Council Brian Deese said the shipment will cover about 15% of the overall national volume needed on shelves right now.

“These planes that are arriving right now are going to provide some incremental relief in the coming days,” Deese said. “We’re going to keep working on it over the course of the week.”

FedEx ramps up vaccine delivery

Under Operation Fly Formula, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services are authorized to use Department of Defense-contracted commercial aircraft to pick up overseas infant formula that meets U.S. health and safety standards so it can get to store shelves faster.

As federal officials work to restore gaps in the supply chain, Mid-South families are feeling the formula shortage.

And while the effects are just now being felt locally, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration recalled multiple brands of formula — all produced by Abbott Labs — in February due to possible bacterial contamination that may have caused at least two infant deaths. Abbott disputes these claims.

Since then, Abbott has worked to resume operations at its Sturgis, Michigan, plant, reaching a consent decree with the FDA on May 16 which would initiate the steps necessary to resume production at the facility.

FedEx suspends operations in Ukraine

In October 2021, a former employee of the Sturgis plant raised concerns about safety violations at the Abbott facility, outlining allegations of lax cleaning practices and other issues, to the FDA, which first investigated the plant in January 2021.

“We have to take safety very seriously,” said Deese, “and part of what happened here was we had a manufacturer that wasn’t following the rules and was making formula that had the risk of making babies sick.

“We have to take action on that front, but ... how do we end up in a market where we have three companies that control 90% of the market. It goes back to this question of how we can bring more competition in our economy and have more providers of this formula so that no individual company has control over supply chains.”

On Saturday, President Biden put into law the Access to Baby Formula Act, which passed in the Senate Thursday by unanimous consent.

The law allows the waiver of certain program requirements in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) due to a supply chain disruption or emergency.

TOPICS**FEDEX RICHARD W. SMITH FEDEX EXPRESS INFANT FORMULA****OPERATION FLY FORMULA****Rob Moore**

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