

FDA investigating a tenth infant who died after consuming Abbott Labs baby formula product

Kevin Reed
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The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced on Wednesday that it was investigating a report of another child that died after consuming baby formula manufactured by Abbott Labs.

The FDA said that the baby died in January and a consumer complaint was filed in February, but the agency only became aware of the complaint on June 10. The new death brings to ten the number of infants that had consumed pediatric nutrition products made by Abbott Labs before they became sick and died.

At the end of a long press release entitled, “FDA Provides Update on Efforts to Increase Supply and Availability of Safe and Nutritious Infant Formula,” the agency reported it received the complaint two weeks ago and that it had initiated an investigation “given that the complaint referenced that the infant had consumed an Abbott product.”

The press statement also says, “To date, the FDA has reviewed and investigated a total of 129 complaints associated with Abbott Nutrition formula products. Of these, 119 complaints were reported after Abbott voluntarily recalled product on February 17.”

The FDA says that of the nine previously reported deaths, “only two were associated with the Abbott Nutrition Sturgis plant investigation,” and that no “definitive link” between the infant deaths and Sturgis facility has been established.

The shutdown of the Sturgis, Michigan factory in February was a belated response of the FDA and Abbott Labs to a whistleblower complaint of unsanitary conditions at the facility and a growing number of reports of sickness and death of infants that consumed product from the facility.

Meanwhile, the closure of the largest powdered baby

food factory in the US, which supplied 40 percent of the market, accelerated the formula shortage that had been developing since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in early 2020.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported, “An Abbott spokesman said at this time there is no evidence to suggest a causal relationship between Abbott’s formulas and this newly reported case.” The Abbott representative claimed that the number one producer of baby formula in the US had been provided with “limited product and clinical information to evaluate the case” and the company will “investigate further if additional information becomes available.”

This is the same belligerent posture that Abbott Labs has adopted throughout the baby formula shortage and the exposure of standing water and bacteria contamination at the Sturgis plant. The FDA was forced to shut down the Sturgis plant because the agency had, in the words of FDA Commissioner Robert Califf, “no confidence in the quality program at the facility.”

Even though the FDA found the presence of *Cronobacter sakazakii*—a bacterium known to cause deadly blood infections (sepsis) and swelling of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis) in infants—at the Sturgis facility, Abbott Labs has maintained throughout that its products were not responsible for infant deaths.

The ability of the company to avoid liability for infant sickness and death from its products was given a significant boost when the FDA and the US Justice Department signed a consent decree on May 16 with Abbott Labs. In exchange for a commitment by the company to reopen the Sturgis facility, the company gets to go on maintaining that the bacteria found by the FDA at the factory never made it into its baby formula

products and had nothing to do with the sickness and death of infants.

Despite the ongoing coverup by both Abbott Labs and the FDA of the bacterial contamination of baby formula, not everyone in the world is accepting claims that there is nothing to worry about. On June 19, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) issued a food recall for certain Abbott brand Similac powdered formula products “due to possible *Cronobacter sakazakii* and *Salmonella*” contamination.

The CFIA warning says, “Food contaminated with *Cronobacter sakazakii* may not look or smell spoiled but can still make you sick. Although *Cronobacter sakazakii* is not commonly linked to human illness, in rare cases it can cause serious or fatal infections.”

Both the expanding number of infants who died after eating Abbott Labs formula and the shortage of baby food on store shelves across the country are manifestations of the crisis and breakdown of the capitalist system. The ruling establishment, preoccupied with profits and wealth accumulation, could care less about the health and welfare of millions of infants and children in the US.

Meanwhile, the Biden administration was so preoccupied with the proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and other crises that it was not even aware that a baby formula shortage crisis was escalating dramatically in the aftermath of the shutdown of the Sturgis factory.

According to a CNN report on Wednesday, the Biden White House did not convene a meeting of baby formula industry representatives until June 1, more than three months after the shutdown of the Abbott Labs factory. The CNN report says, “They told the President more than once that that as soon as the Abbott recalls were announced in February, they knew they had a serious problem on their hands.”

Biden responded by saying, “They did, but I didn’t. I became aware of this problem sometime in—after April—in early April, about how intense it was.”

The indifference by the government and the corporations to families with children was on further display on June 15, when the company announced that severe thunderstorms had flooded the Sturgis factory and forced the shutdown of the plant just 11 days after it had been reopened and production resumed.

On Wednesday, the Biden administration announced

that it will provide logistical support for the equivalent to 16 million 8-ounce bottles of baby formula to be imported into the US from a Nestlé factory in Jalisco, Mexico. The US Department of Health and Human Services is supporting the travel of trucks carrying 1 million pounds of Gerber Good Start Gentle infant formula to US retailers.



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