



Dr Shireen Kassam
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4 October 2021

Dear Dr Shireen Kassam,

Thank you for your recent letter addressed to Dr Gregor Smith, Chief Medical Officer for Scotland, requesting that fortified plant milks are added to the Best Start Foods list of approved foods and included in School Holiday Food Parcels. As a member of the team responsible for Best Start Foods policy, I have been asked to respond.

The Scottish Government follows the advice of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition. Their advice is that infant formula, based on either cows' or goats' milk, is the only suitable alternative to breast milk for babies who are under 12 months old. Recent nutritional advice recommends that children over the age of 12 months should be offered plain cow's milk as it is the most nutritious drink. Alternatives should only be provided when children cannot drink cow's milk for medical, ethical or religious reasons.

If an infant has a cows' milk protein allergy it may be possible to be prescribed an alternative which the family would not have to pay for.

Non-dairy alternative drinks differ nutritionally from dairy milk and the nutritional composition varies greatly across the drinks.

We are keen to ensure that the latest scientific and nutritional advice is taken into account before making any changes. You may be aware that a joint working group, which provides advice to the UK Government on issues of food safety and nutrition, has been set up to consider nutritional aspects associated with consumption of non-dairy alternative drinks. We expect this group to report in the near future and we will then consider what changes should be made to Best Start Foods.

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You also asked about School Holiday Food Parcels. The Scottish Government provides local authorities with funding to enable them to provide support to families who are eligible to receive free school meals during the school holiday periods. Local authorities have the flexibility to decide how to make provision available at a local level. They will normally do so by providing eligible families with food packages directly to their homes or with direct cash payments; supermarket or shop vouchers, allowing families to purchase non-dairy alternatives if required. Where local authorities choose to make provision available through the direct delivery of food packages to homes, we would expect them to take account of any allergies as they would when providing food and drink at school but also to provide alternatives to cow's milk for any family where this has been requested.

I hope you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely

Barry Pattison

SSP : Funeral, Resolutions and Early Years Benefits Policy Unit

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