



## DONOR MILK FOR YOUR BABY COMMON QUESTIONS



### Why use donor milk?

Milk from a baby's mother is always the first choice. When mother's own milk is not available, donor milk is the next best option. Donor milk has active beneficial properties and is similar to mother's own milk. It provides babies with antibodies to fight disease and infection. Human milk gives babies the best chance at survival and growth. It is especially important for sick and very tiny babies.

### What is the Provincial Milk Bank?

The Provincial Milk Bank at BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre screens milk donors, collects and pasteurizes (heat-treats) donated milk and sends it to hospitals for babies in need. Most of the milk is used for sick or very tiny babies that are in one of BC's neonatal intensive care units (NICUs).

### Is donor milk safe?

In BC, we follow the Human Milk Banking Association of North America Guidelines. All donors and their milk are screened. Only healthy breastfeeding mothers who are non-smokers and have a healthy lifestyle are accepted as donors. Milk is also heat-treated and tested.

### How are milk donors screened?

Before accepting mothers as milk donors, they are screened by:

- Asking them questions about their health and life style.
- Asking their doctors questions about their health.
- Testing their blood for infection, including: HIV (also called Human Immunodeficiency Virus), HTLV (Human T-Lymphotropic Virus, related to HIV), syphilis and hepatitis.



## Who gets donor milk?

Pasteurized donor milk is provided to babies who need it the most. A prescription from a doctor or registered midwife is required.

## Does the milk bank ever run out of milk?

Our supply depends on how many donors we have. If supply is low we prioritize providing milk for the sickest babies. Every baby using donor milk needs to have another feeding plan in case supply is low and we cannot provide donor milk.

## Does donor milk cost anything?

Donor milk is provided to your baby at no cost while in hospital. After leaving the hospital, if donor milk is still required, a fee is charged. This fee helps to cover the costs of processing. See [www.bcwomens.ca](http://www.bcwomens.ca) (search for Milk Bank) for current rates.

## How do I store frozen pasteurized milk?

Store pasteurized milk in a freezer until it is used. Milk can be stored in a fridge freezer with a separate door for 6 months or in a deep freeze for 12 months. Check the expiry date on the bottle.

## How do I prepare frozen milk for my baby?

- It is best to thaw milk in the refrigerator. This takes about 12 hours. Milk that was previously frozen can be kept in the fridge for up to 24 hours. Once thawed, do not refreeze.
- Breast milk that has been frozen and thawed may smell different to fresh milk and have white flecks. This is normal.
- Avoid wasting milk. Keep the main container of milk in the fridge and feed your baby an ounce or two at a time from a separate container such as a cup or bottle. You will soon learn how much your baby likes at each feeding.
- If you need to thaw milk quickly:
  - Tighten the cap on the bottle of milk and hold the bottle under lukewarm running tap water OR
  - Stand the bottle of milk in a cup of warm water (use warm not hot water). Water level should NOT touch the bottle cap.
  - **Do NOT microwave or heat milk directly on the stove!**



- After thawing:
  - Tighten the cap on the bottle.
  - Shake the bottle gently so that the fat mixes with the milk.
  - Warm the milk to room temperature immediately before feeding.
- If your baby does not finish the warmed milk at that feeding, throw it out.

## What if I have questions?

Please visit [www.bcwomens.ca](http://www.bcwomens.ca) (search for Milk Bank) or speak with your health care provider.

## Make a financial donation today and help save the lives of sick babies

You can make a difference by giving a gift to BC Women's Hospital Foundation in support of the Provincial Milk Bank. Please visit BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre Foundation at [www.bcwomensfoundation.org](http://www.bcwomensfoundation.org), e-mail [info@bcwomensfoundation.org](mailto:info@bcwomensfoundation.org) or phone 604-875-2270.