

# Using Breast Milk Safely

Extension Consumer Food Safety Fact Sheet

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Breastfeeding is important for both parent and child. However, for various reasons, breastfeeding parents cannot always breastfeed their baby directly. Then it is important for nursing parents and caregivers of the breastfed infants to use safe handling and storage practices to maintain and ensure the high quality of expressed breast milk and the health of the baby.



	<b>Best Practice for Safety</b>	<b>Practices to AVOID</b>
<b>Preparing to express</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always wash hands before expressing or handling breast milk.</li> <li>• Ensure that bottles and equipment are clean.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do <b>NOT</b> express milk in an area that is not clean.</li> </ul>
<b>Storage containers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use clean containers: screw-cap bottles, glass, or hard (BPA-free) plastic cups with tight caps, bags designed for breast milk storage (use bags only for short term storage if possible).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do <b>NOT</b> use ordinary plastic storage bags, formula bottle bags/liners, plastic bottles containing BPA.</li> </ul>
<b>Labeling the containers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Label with date expressed, child's full name (if bringing to a childcare facility).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do <b>NOT</b> use a marker or label that can easily come off in water.</li> </ul>
<b>Adding freshly expressed milk to stored milk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completely cool fresh milk before adding to previously chilled or thawed milk.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do <b>NOT</b> add warm breast milk to frozen breast milk.</li> <li>• Do <b>NOT</b> fill containers to the brim; breast milk expands on freezing.</li> </ul>
<b>Thawing frozen breast milk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thaw oldest milk first.</li> <li>• Thaw in refrigerator (overnight) or in a bowl of warm water or under warm running water.</li> <li>• Use within 24 hours of thawing when stored in a refrigerator. Can keep thawed milk at room temperature for 1 to 2 hours before using.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do <b>NOT</b> thaw at room temperature</li> <li>• Do <b>NOT</b> use a microwave or rapidly boil on the stove, which produces uneven heating and can scald the baby or reduce the milk's nutrients.</li> <li>• Do <b>NOT</b> re-freeze breast milk once it has been thawed.</li> </ul>

	Best Practice for Safety	Practices to AVOID
<b>Before feeding breast milk</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Swirl or shake milk to evenly distribute the cream that rises to the top during storage.</li> <li>Milk can be fed cold or warmed to body temperature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do <b>NOT</b> feed the milk without mixing in the cream first.</li> </ul>
<b>After feeding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use any remaining breast milk within 2 hours after the baby is finished feeding. After 2 hours, discard any remaining milk from that bottle.</li> <li>Carefully wash bottles and pumping equipment with soap and water and let air dry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do <b>NOT</b> save milk from a used bottle for another feeding.</li> </ul>



### How long can I safely store breast milk?

Although it is always best to use freshly expressed breast milk first, listed below are the maximum recommended times for storing breast milk safely **for healthy, full-term infants**.

Location	Temperature	Duration	Comments
Countertop	Room temp (up to 77°F)	4 hours	Be sure containers are covered.
Insulated cooler bag	5 to 39°F	24 hours	Keep ice packs in contact with milk container, limit opening bag.
Refrigerator	40°F	4 days	Store milk in the back of the main body of the refrigerator where temperatures are coldest.
Freezer	0°F	6 to 12 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Store milk toward the back of the freezer, where the temperature stays colder.</li> <li>Milk stored for longer listed durations is safe, but may be lower nutritional quality.</li> </ul>

[https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/recommendations/handling\\_breastmilk.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/recommendations/handling_breastmilk.htm)  
Page last reviewed August 6, 2019.

### References and other useful resources:

- Office of Women's Health, US Department of Health and Human Services. Breastfeeding. Page last reviewed March 14, 2019. <https://www.womenshealth.gov/breastfeeding>
- Mayo Clinic. Breast milk storage: Do's and don'ts. Page last updated April 6, 2018. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/infant-and-toddler-health/in-depth/breast-milk-storage/art-20046350>
- Feeding your newborn: <http://missourifamilies.org/features/nutritionarticles/nut168.htm>
- Feeding Infants in the Child and Adult Care Food Program*. Page last updated March 20, 2019. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/feeding-infants-child-and-adult-care-food-program>
- Your doctor or health care provider should also have good advice and information available.

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**Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service**  
MF3200 rev.

November 2019

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