

# Human Milk Storage Guidelines

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Many parents find it convenient, or even necessary, to collect their breast milk and store it to be used later. This is often the case for parents who are going back to work or school, or for those who are separated from their babies. These guidelines will answer some of the questions you might have about safely storing your breast milk.

## How should I collect the milk?

- Wash your hands with soap and water before **expressing** (squeezing the milk out of your breast) or handling breast milk.
- Use new, clean collection bottles for each pumping session.
- Check the pump, the pump kit, and the tubing to make sure they are clean. Never use moldy tubing, and replace it immediately.
- Clean the pump dials and countertop.

## How should I store the milk?

- At home, you can use human milk storage bags or clean, food-grade containers with tight fitting lids to store your expressed breast milk.
  - Don't store milk in containers made of plastic containing bisphenol A (BPA). These types of plastic containers are marked with the recycle symbol #7 (a triangle made of arrows with the number 7 in the center).
- Clearly label the milk with the date it was expressed. Include your baby's name on the label if you plan to give the milk to a childcare provider.
- Store the milk in the back of the freezer or refrigerator (do not store it in the door of the fridge or freezer).

- If you don't plan to use freshly expressed milk within 4 days, freeze it right away.
  - Leave an inch of space at the top of the container you are freezing, because the milk will expand when it freezes.

### **How much milk should I store in each container?**

After their first week of life, most babies typically take 2-4 ounces of human milk per feeding. We recommend that you store milk in small amounts of 2-4 ounces to avoid wasting any of your expressed milk.

### **Can I add freshly expressed breast milk to breast milk that was cooled or frozen?**

Freshly expressed, warm milk should be chilled completely in the refrigerator before adding it to milk that was cooled or frozen before.

### **How do I thaw frozen milk?**

- Always thaw the oldest milk first.
- **Do not use a microwave oven to thaw containers of breast milk.** We recommend slowly thawing the milk in the refrigerator overnight.
- You can also thaw frozen milk by placing the container of milk under lukewarm running water, or by using a waterless warmer.
- Once completely thawed, use the milk within 24 hours.
- **Do not refreeze breast milk once it has been thawed.**

### **How do I prepare thawed milk for feeding?**

- You can give the milk to your baby cold, room temperature, or warm.
- To warm the milk, place the sealed (closed) container of thawed breast milk in a cup of warm water. You can check the temperature before

feeding by putting a few drops of milk on your wrist. The milk should feel warm, **not hot**.

- **Do not heat breast milk on the stove or in the microwave.**
  - Microwaving causes uneven heating which can burn your baby's mouth or damage the milk.
- Swirl the container of milk gently before feeding your baby.
- Once warmed, you should use the milk **within 2 hours**.
- **Do not save milk from a used bottle for another feeding.**

### **How do I clean the pump parts and milk storage containers?**

- After each use, you must take apart the pump kits, milk collection containers, and other feeding items to wash them.
- Use a clean bowl with hot soapy water to wash the items.
  - Do not wash items directly in the sink, because germs in the sink could get onto the items and make your baby sick.
- Rinse the items really well under running water.
- Let the items air dry on a clean cloth or paper towel.
- Using clean hands, put away the dry items. Store them in a clean, protected area.

### **Do I need to sanitize (deep clean and disinfect) the pump parts and milk storage containers?**

- For extra safety to make sure there are no germs, sanitize your pump kits, milk collection containers, and other feeding items every day using one of these methods:
  - Clean them in the dishwasher using hot water and a heated drying cycle (or the "Sanitize" setting, if your dishwasher has one).

- Boil them in water for 5 minutes (after cleaning them with soap and water).
- Steam them in a microwave or a plug-in steam system. Follow the manufacturer's directions (after cleaning them with soap and water).

### **Is there anything I should do differently if my baby is hospitalized?**

- While your baby is in the hospital, you should use the small (80 ml) milk storage bottles provided by the hospital.
  - The bottles can be connected directly to most pump kits, so you can collect and store the milk in the same bottles.
- When you are traveling, you can store milk in an insulated cooler bag with frozen ice packs for up to 24 hours.
- If you are delivering breast milk to the hospital, clearly label each bottle with **your baby's name, medical registration number (MRN), and the date and time of pumping**. Your baby's nurse can give you printed labels with your baby's name and MRN if you need them.

### **What else do I need to know about how long I can store breast milk?**

See the table below for detailed information about how long you can safely store and use milk, depending on what type of milk it is and where it is stored.

Type of breast milk	Storage locations and temperatures		
	Countertop (up to 77°F or 25°C, or room temperature)	Refrigerator (40°F or 4°C)	Freezer (0°F or -18°C or colder)
Freshly expressed or pumped milk	Up to 4 hours	Up to 4 days	Within 6 months is best. Up to 12 months is acceptable.
Milk that was frozen and then thawed	1-2 hours	Up to 1 day (24 hours)	Never refreeze human milk after it has been thawed.
Milk leftover from a feeding (baby didn't finish the bottle)	Use within 2 hours after the baby is done feeding		

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