

# Breastmilk Storage Guidelines

Breastmilk whether fresh or stored is considered to be the gold standard for infant feeding. Knowing how to handle, store, and prepare your expressed breastmilk will help maintain the safety and quality of your breastmilk. Listed below are general guidelines for storing breastmilk for healthy full-term babies. These guidelines are NOT for a healthcare facility (hospital). If your baby is a patient at a healthcare facility, speak to your healthcare provider for the appropriate guidelines and storage containers.

***If you have questions, contact your WIC office or the ADHS Breastfeeding 24/7 Hotline 1-800-833-4642.***

## Before You Collect Milk

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer. Unwashed hands may transmit viruses and bacteria. It is not necessary to clean your breasts before expression.
- Use clean milk collection supplies. Wash the breast pump kit and milk collection bottles in hot soapy water, rinsing well, and air dry. Check to see if you can use a dishwasher to clean your milk collection equipment (except the pump motor). Not sure what breast pump part is washable? Check the manufacturer of the breast pump or call the ADHS Breastfeeding 24/7 Hotline 1-800-833-4642.
- Use a container designed and safe for breastmilk storage, freezing and thawing process. Ordinary bottle liners and plastic sandwich bags may look similar, but they are not the same. Plastic breast milk storage bottles, food-safe glass containers, and milk storage trays are storage options.

## Type of Milk, Storage Location and Temperatures

**Counter top or Room Temp** Up to 85°F/25°C

**Freshly Pumped/ Expressed Human milk** Up to 4 hours

**Thawed Breastmilk *Previously Frozen*** Up to 2 hours

**Leftover from a Feeding (*baby did not finish the bottle*)** Use within 2 hours after the baby is finished feeding

**Refrigerator** At or below 40°F/-4°C

**Freshly Pumped/ Expressed Human milk** Up to 4 days

**Thawed Breastmilk *Previously Frozen*** Up to 1 day (24 hours)

**Leftover from a Feeding (*baby did not finish the bottle*)** Use within 2 hours after the baby is finished feeding

**Freezer with separate door** 0°F/-18°C or colder

**Freshly Pumped/ Expressed Human milk** Up to 6 months

**Thawed Breastmilk *Previously Frozen*** Avoid re-freezing thawed breastmilk

**Leftover from a Feeding (*baby did not finish the bottle*)** Use within 2 hours after the baby is finished feeding

**Deep Freezer** At or below -4°F/-20°C

**Freshly Pumped/ Expressed Human milk** Up to 12 months

**Thawed Breastmilk *Previously Frozen*** Avoid re-freezing thawed breastmilk

**Leftover from a Feeding (*baby did not finish the bottle*)** Use within 2 hours after the baby is finished feeding

\* Storage times and temperatures may vary for premature or sick babies. Check with your health care provider.

## Transporting Your Breastmilk

When transporting or traveling with expressed breastmilk, store your milk containers in an insulated cooler bag with frozen ice packs. Freshly pumped milk will stay cold for approximately 8-12 hours in an insulated cooler bag.

## Storing Your Breastmilk in a Refrigerator or Freezer

- Put the collection date on the container. You may also have to place your child's name on the container if you are providing milk to a childcare provider. Talk to them regarding their guidelines and requirements for utilizing expressed breastmilk.
- Leave an inch or so space at the top of the container because milk will expand as it gets cold or freezes.
- Chill freshly pumped milk before adding to cold milk. Placing warm milk into cold milk warms up the cold milk and thus limits the length of storage time.
- Store milk in small batches of 2 to 4 ounces. This will decrease waste especially when your baby is still drinking small volumes of milk. Not sure how much your baby should be taking for their age and weight? Speak to their healthcare provider or call the ADHS Breastfeeding 24/7 Hotline 1-800-833-4642.
- Store milk in the back of the refrigerator or freezer. Don't store milk on the door or in front of the refrigerator or freezer as this is the warmest area of the refrigerator or freezer.

## Thawing and Warming Breastmilk

- Use the oldest stored milk first. Practice “First In, First Out” (FIFO)
- Milk may be thawed several ways, 1- in the refrigerator overnight, 2- under running warm water, or 3- in a container of warm water. Milk is considered thawed when there are no ice crystals and the milk has become liquid.
- It is normal for milk to separate when it gets cold. Gently swirl the milk (don’t shake it) to mix it.
- Breast milk does not need to be warmed. It can be served room temperature or cold.
- To warm milk, place the closed bottle in a cup of warm water or under running warm water. NEVER microwave breastmilk (or formula) as this creates dangerous hot spots in the milk and breaks down nutrients.
- If you do warm your breastmilk, test the milk temperature by dropping some on your wrist. It should feel neither cold, or hot, or warm. This would indicate it is body temperature.

You may find there are different resources providing different variations on the amount of time you can store breast milk at room temperature, in the refrigerator, and in the freezer. Speak with your local WIC office, or healthcare provider, or call the ADHS Breastfeeding 24/7 Hotline 1-800-833-4642 if you have any concerns or questions.

Adapted from 7th Edition American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Pediatric Nutrition Handbook (2014); 2nd Edition AAP/American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) Breastfeeding Handbook for Physicians (2014); and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM) Clinical Protocol #8 Human Milk Storage Guidelines (2017).



**24-Hour Breastfeeding Hotline**  
**1-800-833-4642**

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Arizona Department of Health Services 2020