

# Informal Breastmilk Sharing

## Risks and Recommendations

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**Certified human milk banks can provide safe, screened breastmilk for your baby. For your child's health and safety while at Seattle Children's, we discourage the use of informally shared breastmilk.**

Seattle Children's strongly encourages and supports giving your baby breastmilk by breastfeeding or pumping. If your breastmilk supply is low, it may be tempting to use breastmilk from someone you know or to buy breastmilk over the Internet, but informal breastmilk sharing can put your baby at risk for infections and other health and safety concerns. It is Seattle Children's policy to discourage the use of informally shared breastmilk for your baby while they are a patient at the hospital. We will work with you to find the best ways to nourish your baby.

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### What is informally shared breastmilk?

Informally shared breastmilk is milk that comes from someone other than the baby's mother. It could be from a family member or a friend or from another source that is not a certified human milk bank. This milk has safety risks.

It does not include donor breastmilk, which comes from a certified human milk bank. Donor breastmilk is screened, pasteurized, tested, and considered safe for any baby.

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### What are the safety risks of informally sharing breastmilk?

Risks for the baby include:

- Diseases like HIV, hepatitis B and cytomegalovirus (CMV) and other viruses, bacteria or germs that pass through breastmilk.
- Chemical contaminants, herbs, illegal drugs and prescription drugs that might be in the breastmilk.
- Other liquids added to the breastmilk. For example, one research study found that 11% of milk sold as human milk online contained cow's milk.
- Contamination (food poisoning) from milk that has not been safely stored or handled.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends feeding a baby breastmilk only from their own mother to avoid these safety risks.

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### Can I buy donor breastmilk?

For your baby's health and safety, we recommend feeding them only your breastmilk or breastmilk from a human milk bank that is certified by the Human Milk Banking Association of North America (HMBANA).

You can buy donor milk from any HMBANA milk bank. You may need a prescription from your baby's doctor.

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#### To Learn More

- Lactation Services  
206-987-1420
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

#### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Contact HMBANA about how much it costs and how you can ship donor breastmilk to your home or the hospital. Call 817-810-9984 or visit [www.hmbana.org](http://www.hmbana.org).

The HMBANA-certified milk bank closest to Seattle is Northwest Mothers Milk Bank in Portland, OR. Call 503-469-0955 or toll-free at 800-204-4444 or visit [www.donatemilk.org](http://www.donatemilk.org).

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### **Can I use breastmilk from another mother?**

If you choose to feed your baby breastmilk that is not from you or a certified human milk bank, you and your child's legal guardians must sign Seattle Children's Acknowledgement of Risk Form: Informal Breastmilk Sharing. Your baby's provider will review this with you.

By signing the form, you agree that:

- You are declining the medical advice of your baby's care team.
- You have screened the sharing mother's health status using the HMBANA guidelines for donating mothers listed in the form.

In general, the sharing mother who is giving her breastmilk should be in good health, not use any tobacco products or illegal drugs, and not be at risk for any blood-related illnesses. See the form for specific criteria. Ideally you would pay for the sharing mother to get blood tests to ensure she is free from diseases that are passed through breastmilk.

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### **What if I have more questions about safely feeding my baby?**

Please talk with your child's provider. You may also contact our Lactation Services team at 206-987-1420.

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