

Storage and preparation of human milk

The steps below can help you safely express, store, and prepare human milk, as well as how to clean and disinfect feeding equipment. How long you can safely store human milk depends on several things, including where it's stored and your baby's health. For premature babies with health concerns, or in emergency feeding situations, storage times may be shorter. If you have questions, ask your health care provider or call HealthLink BC at 8-1-1. For guidance on safely feeding your baby during emergencies, download the HealthLink BC Health File: www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/feeding-your-baby-during-emergency.

1. Preparing to express milk

- **Wash** your hands with soap and warm water.
- Wash your work area with a clean dishcloth, soap and warm water. Dry with a clean towel.
- **Inspect** the pump kit and tubing to make sure it is clean. Replace tubing immediately if it is mouldy.
- **Clean** pump dials and power switch according to manufacture instructions.



2. Storing expressed milk

- **Store** in human milk storage bags or clean, food-grade containers. Make sure the containers are made of glass or BPA-free plastic and have tight fitting lids.
- **Do not** store human milk in disposable bottle liners or plastic bags that are not intended for storing human milk because they often break and may not seal tightly.
- Label milk with the date it was expressed and the child's name if delivering to a hospital or childcare.
- Let your freshly pumped milk cool before adding to cold or frozen milk.
- Freeze milk in **small amounts of 2 to 4 ounces** to avoid wasting any.
- When freezing, leave an inch of space at the top of the container; human milk expands as it freezes.
- If you don't plan to use freshly expressed milk **within 4 days**, freeze it right away.
- Milk can be stored in an insulated cooler bag with frozen ice packs for **up to 24 hours** when you are travelling.
- Store milk in the back of the freezer or refrigerator, not the door.
- For more tips on milk storage during air travel, see The Canadian Air Transport Security Authority www.catsa-acsta.gc.ca/en/travel-tips/families



How long can human milk be stored?

TYPES OF EXPRESSED MILK	STORAGE LOCATION AND TEMPERATURE			
	Room temperature 25°C (77°F) or colder	Refrigerator 4°C (39.2°F)	Freezer (separate door freezer on fridge) -18°C (-0.4°F) or colder	Deep freezer -20°C (-4°F)
Freshly expressed	Up to 6 hours	Up to 5 days	Up to 6 months	Up to 12 months
Thawed in fridge but not warmed	Up to 4 hours	Up to 24 hours	Do not refreeze	
Thawed and brought to room temperature	Up to 4 hours	Up to 4 hours	Do not refreeze	
Leftover from a feeding (baby did not finish milk)	Use milk within 2 hours after your baby is finished feeding. Do not refrigerate or freeze the milk. After 2 hours, leftover milk should be thrown out.			
These guidelines are for healthy full-term babies. Milk storage guidelines for premature or sick babies may vary, check with your health care provider before you start storing your milk.				
Throw out all expressed milk that is older than the above storage times!				

3. Thawing milk

- **Always thaw the oldest milk first.**
- Thaw milk under lukewarm running water, in a container of lukewarm water, or overnight in the refrigerator.
- Never thaw or heat milk in a microwave. Microwaving destroys nutrients and creates hot spots, which can burn a baby's mouth.
- Use milk **within 24 hours** of thawing in the refrigerator (*from the time it is completely thawed, not from the time when you took it out of the freezer*).
- Use thawed milk **within 4 hours** of bringing to room temperature.
- **Never refreeze thawed milk.**



4. Feeding milk

- Milk can be **served cold, room temperature, or warm.**
- To heat the milk, place the tightly sealed container into a clean bowl of warm water or hold it under warm running water without getting the lid wet.
- **Do not heat** milk directly on the stove or in the microwave.
- Test the temperature before feeding it to your baby by putting a few drops on your wrist. It should feel warm, **not hot.**
- Gently swirl the milk to mix the fat, which may have separated.
- If your baby did not finish the bottle, leftover milk should be used **within 2 hours.**



5. Cleaning and disinfecting feeding equipment

All equipment used to feed your baby should be cleaned after each use and disinfected daily. Disinfecting means killing germs that could make your baby sick. If your baby was born premature or has a weakened immune system, all feeding equipment should be disinfected more often.

▪ **First — clean everything:**

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water.
- Wash your work area with a clean dishcloth, soap and warm water. Dry with a clean towel.
- Wash pump parts and feeding equipment after each use in a clean basin or container with warm soapy water. Avoid washing in the sink because the germs in the sink can contaminate items.
- Scrub containers and feeding parts with a clean brush **that is only used for feeding equipment.**
- Rinse all items with hot running water.
- Set clean equipment on a clean dishtowel or paper towel.



▪ **Then — disinfect everything:**

- Fill a pot with cold water.
- Add the clean items, including clean tongs. Make sure everything is covered with water.
- Bring the water to a boil. Let it boil uncovered for 2 minutes.
- Take out the items with disinfected tongs.
- Let them air dry on a clean towel or paper towel.
- Using clean hands, store dry items in a clean area.



Note: Follow the pump or equipment manufacturer's instructions for cleaning and disinfecting, including when using a store-bought disinfectant or sterilizer, steaming equipment in a microwave, or using a plug-in steam system (after cleaning feeding equipment).