

Facts for WIC staff about using donor breastmilk

This handout provides information and talking points about the risk factors: “Potentially Contaminated Foods” and “Unsafe Handling/Storage of Breastmilk/Formula”. These risks will now include *Breastmilk – Feeding donor breastmilk acquired directly from individuals or the Internet*. See [Chapter 14 – Nutrition Risk Criteria](#) for more information.

These risk factors include feeding donor breastmilk acquired from:

- Casual or informal milk sharing between mothers.
- Social media sites.
- Internet purchases.

These risks don’t include milk from milk banks, like the Northwest Mother’s Milk Bank, or sterilized donor milk available to hospitalized infants. Banked milk is usually only available in a hospital setting.

Known risks of giving breastmilk from other sources to infants:

- A study of breastmilk shared through the internet found high amounts of bacteria and other contaminants due to poor collection, storage, and shipping practices ¹.
- A study of potential donors who were thought to be low risk, found that about 3% of donors tested positive for diseases such as syphilis, HIV, hepatitis B and C, and other viruses. The study concluded that if these low risk potential donors tested positive, then the untested or unscreened women providing donor breastmilk may present a significant health risk ².
- The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommend against feeding infants breastmilk obtained directly from individuals or through the internet ^{3,4}. Obtaining donor breastmilk by these means is discouraged due to the lack of adequate screening for infectious diseases and the risk of contamination ⁴.

Screening for and documenting these risks in Client Services:

When an infant’s caregiver tells you he or she is feeding donor milk obtained from the internet or through an informal milk sharing:

- Mark the risk factors, Potentially Contaminated Foods and Unsafe Handling/Storage of Breastmilk.
- When completing a risk assessment, complete the entire assessment before offering education on this risk.
- Use the talking points for WIC staff to share information about this risk during the nutrition education conversation.

References:

1. AAP - Microbial contamination of human milk purchased via the internet. *Pediatrics*. October 21, 2013; 10.1542/peds. 2013-1687.
2. Cohen RS, Xiong SC, Sakamoto P. Retrospective review of serological testing of potential human donors; *Arch Dis Child Fetal Neonatal Ed* 2010 95: F118-F120.
3. FDA - Use of donor human milk <http://www.fda.gov/ScienceResearch/SpecialTopics/PediatricTherapeuticsResearch/ucm235203.htm>
4. AAP - Breastfeeding and the use of human milk. *Pediatrics*. Feb 2005; *American Academy of Pediatrics*. Volume 115/Issue2, Revised 100(6):1035.

Talking points for WIC staff when caregivers disclose feeding donor breastmilk

Encourage caregivers to share that they're feeding breastmilk they got informally with the infant's healthcare provider.

Ask for permission to share the known risks of getting breastmilk over the internet and through informal milk sharing with the caregiver.

Before sharing information about the possible risks of breastmilk sharing, consider opening the conversation with phases such as:

- It's great that you want to provide breastmilk to your baby.
- Informal milk sharing has possible risks to your baby so it's something WIC asks about. Tell me more about where you're getting the breastmilk.
- Can I share a few of the things we know about buying breastmilk over the internet or casual milk sharing with other mothers? Choose from the talking points below that are relevant to your conversation:
 - Viruses and bacteria in breastmilk from other mothers or bought over the internet can make your baby very sick, especially if your baby is already sick or premature.
 - Samples of breastmilk bought over the internet and through informal milk sharing showed high amounts of bacteria from improper storage and handling.
 - Some samples contained cow's milk and other liquids. There's no way to tell what you're buying.
 - Even women who think they're healthy may have an infection or a virus they don't know about. Or they may not tell you.

Remember: In WIC we respect the choices parents make for their children and themselves.
Resist the "righting reflex"!

If appropriate, ask if she's interested in learning about ways to increase her milk supply.

You could open the conversation with: WIC has many resources for supporting breastfeeding. Let me know if you want to learn more about how we may be able to help you increase your milk production. We're here to support you.

- What have you tried to increase your own milk production?
- Can you tell me more about the type of pump you're using and where you got it? WIC provides free pumps for those who qualify and they're good quality too.

If clients ask to donate breastmilk:

Praise clients wanting to donate the precious gift of breastmilk. Refer them to the Northwest Mother's Milk Bank at: <http://www.nwmmb.org/> or (503) 469-0955. There isn't a cost to donate.

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