

## Frequently asked questions

### What is pasteurized human donor milk?

Breast milk that has been donated to a milk bank and pasteurized in a heat treatment process that eliminates harmful bacteria/viruses.

The pasteurization process is similar to that used to ensure the safety of cow's milk. Pasteurized donor milk goes through a rigorous testing process to ensure its safety.

### Does pasteurization change breast milk?

Most of the unique nutrients and components (such as immune factors) found only in human breast milk are retained after pasteurization. There are slightly lower levels of some nutrients however all babies in the NICU have their growth monitored.

### How does the Milk Bank maintain high standards of quality?

The Milk Bank follows guidelines set by the Human Milk Banking Association of North America (HMBANA) and public health regulations governing the handling, processing and storage of food.

### Who will be offered donor milk?

Fragile, hospitalized babies, including low birth weight babies when there is not enough of their own mother's milk. If donor milk supplies are limited, the highest risk babies will receive donor milk.

## Want to know more?

For more information, please visit [milkbankontario.ca](http://milkbankontario.ca)

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The Rogers Hixon  
Ontario Human Milk Bank  
is a non-profit organization  
and member of the Human  
Milk Banking Association  
of North America.

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## Guidance for Donor Milk Usage

### Pasteurized breast milk for preterm babies of Islamic faith



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**Sinai  
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Human Milk Bank

## The Rogers Hixon Ontario Human Milk Bank

Due to medical complications, preterm babies in hospitals often don't have access to a full supply of their mother's own milk, putting them at risk of life-threatening complications.

Donated human milk can help protect a hospitalized baby's health. Studies have shown that it reduces the rate of medical complications and gives vulnerable babies the best start.

The Rogers Hixon Ontario Human Milk Bank, located at Mount Sinai Hospital, collects, pasteurizes and distributes donated breast milk to hospitals across Ontario where it is given by prescription to the most vulnerable babies.

**Women are only eligible to donate after a rigorous screening which includes both a health review and the completion of a blood test.** This process is similar to that used for donating blood. Several milk donations are blended for nutritional balance, so there is no possibility for directed donation.

Parents of various faiths may have observances related to diet or feeding their newborn, which may raise questions about donor milk. If you have more questions, ask your baby's healthcare provider. A consultation about donor milk may also be arranged with your spiritual and religious leaders.

## Donor milk for your hospitalized baby

In Islam, the issue of using donor milk raises the question of whether this establishes kinship between the donor family and the infant receiving the donor milk.

In 2004, in response to this concern, well known religious scholars, backed by the European Council of Fatwa and Research issued a detailed ruling. The ruling began by commending the idea of human milk banks, stating that it has a noble aim which Islam advocates, namely, taking care of helpless preterm infants. The ruling stated that there is no barrier in Islam either to establish milk banks or to make use of them and that this type of feeding does not institute kinship.<sup>1</sup>

The following three reasons explain this:

1) The exact meaning of suckling which institutes kinship needs explanation. Quoting the Quran verse which counts the set of relatives with whom one cannot marry: '... and your mothers who have suckled you and your foster sisters' [Suṛat al-Nisa' 04:23]: The verse speaks about 'motherhood' and 'suckling', something which cannot be constituted just by consuming donor milk. Establishing kinship requires suckling and being in close contact with the mother, where bonding and attachment can occur between

the woman breastfeeding and the suckling infant. Providing milk through a feeding tube or a bottle does not constitute suckling, and therefore does not institute kinship. In addition, donor milk is not considered the same as the foster-mother relationship assumed by the Quran. A majority of Muslim scholars suggest that there is no evidence that drinking anonymously donated breast milk for the purpose of the well-being of the infant is haram (forbidden).

- 2) The identity of the donor mother and the amount of milk donated by each mother is not known. There is typically 3-4 donor mothers' milk mixed in each batch of donor milk. Thus the infant does not receive one fulfilling feed from one donor, a further requirement to establish kinship. When the donor mother is anonymous and the volume of milk received from each donor is not known, there would be no kinship.
- 3) Islam is a religion that prioritizes the health and wellbeing of children and does not impose hardship upon its followers. The health protective effects of donor milk for medically fragile infants are a powerful argument for its use.

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<sup>1</sup>El-Khuffash A, Unger S. J Hum Lact. 2012 May;28(2):125-7.