

Job Aid

Storing breast milk safely

Storing breast milk safely is important for infant's health and safety. Use this information to coach participants about storing breast milk.

Storing breast milk

At room temperature

- Breast milk may be stored at room temperature (up to 77°F) up to 4 hours.
 - Discard breast milk stored at room temperature longer than 4 hours.
- Cover containers as soon as possible.
- Keep the breast milk as cool as possible. Do not store in sunshine.
- Covering the container with a clean cool towel may keep milk cooler.
- Throw out any leftover milk within 2 hours after the baby is finished feeding.

In the refrigerator

- Refrigerator should be at 40°F or below.
- Up to 4 days.
- Label the container as breast milk and the date stored.
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- Store milk in the back of the refrigerator.
- It's OK to put breastmilk in a shared refrigerator at work.
Be sure to label the container clearly.

In the freezer

- Freezer 0°F or colder. Use within 6 months is best. Up to 12 months is acceptable.
- Store milk toward the back of the freezer where the temperature is most constant.
- Milk stored at 0°F or colder is safe for longer durations, but the quality of the milk might not be as high.
- Clearly label milk containers with the date the milk was expressed. And the date added to the freezer.
 - Include your child's name if you are giving the milk to a childcare provider.
- Freeze in small amounts (2 to 4 ounces, or ¼ to ½ cups).
- Leave an inch or so from the milk to the top of the container. The milk needs more room to expand when it is frozen.
- Wait to tighten bottle caps or lids until the milk is completely frozen. Liquids take up more room after they are frozen.
- **Do not** re-freeze breast milk.

Thawing frozen breast milk

- Use the oldest breast milk first.
- Thaw the bottle or bag of frozen milk in the refrigerator.
 - Put it in the refrigerator overnight to thaw by morning.
- Breast milk does not need to be warmed. Some moms prefer to serve it at room temperature. Some moms serve it cold.
- Use breastmilk within 24 hours of thawing it in the refrigerator. This means 24 hours from when the breastmilk is no longer frozen, not from when you take it out of the freezer.
- Once breast milk is thawed to room temperature or warmed after being in the refrigerator or freezer, use it within 2 hours.

Storing thawed breast milk:

It is best to use thawed breast milk soon after thawing. Here are guidelines for storing breast milk that has been thawed after freezing.

- Room temperature (up to 77°F for 1 to 2 hours)
- Refrigerator (40°F for up to 1 day (24 hours))

Warming stored breast milk

- Keep the container sealed while warming.
- Hold it under warm, not hot, running water, or set it in a container of water that is warm, not hot.
- **Never put a bottle or bag of breastmilk in the microwave.** Microwaving creates hot spots that could burn your baby and damage immune-supporting nutrients and antibodies.
- Test the temperature before feeding it to your baby by dropping some on your wrist. The milk should feel warm, not hot.
- Swirl the milk to mix the fat, which may have separated. Do not shake the milk. Shaking can break down bioactive components like fat molecules and damage immune-supporting proteins, enzymes.
- If you have any leftover milk when the baby is finished feeding, be sure to throw it out within 2 hours.
- Do not refreeze breastmilk after it has been thawed.

Resources

The following are available in Shopify:

- [Storing and Thawing Breast Milk](#)
- [Storage and Preparation of Breast Milk – English](#)
- [Storage and Preparation of Breast Milk – Spanish](#)
- [Pumping and storing breast milk \(English and Spanish\) - Shopify](#)