

Neonatology

Breast milk - storage, handling and transport

Information for parents

When you are expressing milk at home it is very important that it is stored, handled and transported carefully to make sure that it is safe to give to your baby. This leaflet explains the steps you should take to help keep your milk safe.

If you have any questions about the information below please speak to the nurse looking after your baby.

Storage times for mother's expressed breast milk (MEBM) – once these times have passed you must throw the milk away						
	Freshly expressed, stored at room temperature	Stored in a fridge at 2-4°C	Removed from fridge before feeding then brought to room temperature	Frozen and stored at -20°C	Thawed (defrosted) and stored at 2-4°C	Thawed and kept at room temperature before feeding
In hospital	Up to 4 hours	Up to 48 hours, but if not used within this time, freeze as soon as possible.	Up to 4 hours	Up to 3 months	24 hours from the start of defrost if thawed in a fridge (preferred option) OR 12 hours once fully thawed at room temperature	Up to 4 hours
Once at home	Up to 6 hours	Up to 8 days if stored at 2-4°C. Up to 3 days if stored at 5-10°C. Freeze as soon as possible after expressing if to be kept for more than 8 days.	Up to 4 hours	Up to 6 months. 2 weeks if in the ice box of a domestic fridge.	24 hours from the start of defrost if thawed in a fridge (preferred option) OR 12 hours once fully thawed at room temperature	Up to 4 hours

Handling and transport

Before storing and transporting breast milk it should always be:

- labelled with your baby's name, date of birth, hospital number and the mother's name
- labelled with the date and time it was expressed

In a fridge breast milk should be:

- stored in a new, clear plastic bag or a clean plastic box with a lid to keep it away from food
- stored at the back of the fridge and not in the fridge door or front of the fridge as these areas tend to be warmer.
- Please clean your bag/boxes daily and your fridge weekly.

In a freezer breast milk should be:

- frozen in small containers to avoid wastage once defrosted.
- allow enough space at the top of the container for the milk to expand when it freezes

Before being brought into hospital breast milk should be:

- ideally stored in a fridge, rather than a freezer, for a maximum of 48 hours
- carried in a cool bag with ice packs

After you go home

- Please take your leftover milk home with you when your baby is discharged.
- We will keep it for 4 weeks then we will have to discard it to make room for new milk
- If you would like to donate your milk to the milk bank please let your nurse know

Colour of breast milk

- Breast milk can be discoloured by blood or other pigments - there is no reason to discard discoloured breast milk.
- Check with your baby's nurse if you have any concerns about the colour of the breast milk

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at **imperial.pals@nhs.net** The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department

Fourth floor

Salton House

St Mary's Hospital

Praed Street

London W2 1NY

Email: **ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net**

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

[Alternative formats](#)

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: **imperial.patient.information@nhs.net**

Thanks to the COSMIC Charity for providing cool bags to parents