

OBS POLICY ON MILK SHARING

When there is not enough *mother's milk available for a baby to grow normally and remain healthy, additional milk is necessary. Some parents may wish to explore the possibility of sourcing human milk for their babies in order to protect exclusivity of human milk feeding.

Milk Banks

- OBS recognises that there are significant risks to the use of unregulated, unpasteurised donor milk and that the safest way to source human milk is via a regulated Milk Bank adhering to National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines. Milk Banks screen donors for communicable diseases and lifestyle factors, test milk for bacterial levels, pasteurise it and store it appropriately. Such processing may reduce immunological properties. Milk is distributed according to clear guidelines, prioritising the most vulnerable babies.
- OBS will signpost parents to [Oxford Human Milk Bank](#) (OHMB) in the first instance and to [Hearts Milk Bank](#) if OHMB is unable to help. OHMB will take milk from donors whose babies are aged 6 weeks to 6 months at the point when donation starts, up to a year of age. Milk is only provided to babies in hospital. Hearts Milk Bank will take milk from mothers of older babies, and may sometimes provide milk for use in the community.
- OBS will work with OHMB to promote milk donation, and will actively suggest milk donation to mothers who may be suitable and willing donors, both in drop-in sessions and online.

When parents choose to source human milk other than from the mother or a regulated Milk Bank, OBS will:

- Inform them of the potential risks of informal milk sharing (listed below).
- If parents want to continue, understanding these risks, inform them of how to mitigate these risks, including sourcing milk locally from a known, trusted donor, using advised hygiene, storage and transport processes and having a full and frank discussion of relevant medical problems and potential harmful exposures with the donor.
- If parents want to source milk online, understanding the increased risk of this approach, advise them to use established sites such as [Eats on Feets](#) or [Human Milk 4 Human Babies](#), carefully following their guidelines.
- OBS will not facilitate or enable informal milk sharing either in drop-in sessions or online forums. Mothers/families who seek to use OBS forums to share or source milk informally will be directed to this policy, and (if online) their posts will be removed.

The accepted potential risks posed by human milk sharing include:

- Infection through contamination
- Exposure to harmful medications, tobacco, alcohol, herbal products or illegal drugs taken by the donor
- Infection through human milk-borne organisms such as HIV
- Degradation of nutritional and immune properties through storage and transport
- The potential supply of another substance other than human milk

*Note: “mother” is used here as a convenient shorthand, and a term which is used by the majority of breastfeeding dyads. However, we recognise that not all lactating parents and carers will be the child’s biological mother, or identify as female, or as a mother.

Further reading

[La Leche League GB’s Milk Sharing Policy](#)

[Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine Position Statement, 2017](#)

Milk sharing: from private practice to public pursuit

James E Akre, Karleen D Gribble and Maureen Minchin, *International Breastfeeding Journal* 2011, 6:8

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