

# Formula, Banked Donor Milk, and Shared Milk: What is Important to Know?

MilkWorks supports the breastfeeding process, the value of human milk and the desire of mothers to feed their babies human milk. We also know that some mothers have a low milk supply, and that some babies cannot get all the milk they need from their own mothers.

Historically, mothers have shared their milk with babies other than their own. This was generally done directly at the breast (aka “wet nursing”) prior to the availability of quality breast pumps, the development of a modern cow’s milk formula, and the advent of pasteurized donor human milk banks. Today, quality pumps allow mothers to donate their milk to a milk bank, as well as share their milk directly with another mother.

Health care providers are generally not comfortable with wet nursing and direct milk sharing because some illnesses and medications can be transferred through breast milk. We do not have adequate research on the handling of pumped milk, especially when milk is shared via the internet and accepted from an unknown mother. For these reasons, MilkWorks does not connect mothers with other mothers to directly share milk.

Formula is a known infant food that has been used on a widespread basis for the past 60 years. Most medical experts are more comfortable with formula and banked donor milk than shared milk. At the same time, we know that human milk is designed to enhance a baby’s immune system and promote optimal health.

Banked human milk is an ideal substitute for babies who cannot receive their own mother’s milk because it has been screened and pasteurized (heat treated). It creates a level of security for health care providers and parents. However, it is not easily available nor affordable for long term use. Until banked donor milk is financially accessible for all babies who require supplementation, formula will remain a readily available option accepted by health care providers.

We encourage you to discuss questions and concerns you have about supplementing your baby with your baby’s health care provider.

Our goal is to encourage parents to make an educated decision when it comes to supplementing their babies. We respect and support the individual decisions that mothers make as they nourish and feed their babies.

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