

SAFE HANDLING OF BREAST MILK

Many studies have shown the benefits of breastfeeding. This section is not intended to discourage breastfeeding or bottle feeding of breast milk in childcare or schools settings. These guidelines are provided to prevent transmission of infectious organisms that may be contained in breast milk.

General information

Breast milk is a body fluid. The transmission of HIV from mother to infant through breastfeeding is well documented. **Women who have HIV infection are advised not to breastfeed their infants.** Breastfeeding is not contraindicated for infants born to mothers who are infected with hepatitis B virus or mothers who are infected with hepatitis C virus.

Prevention of exposures

- Store each child's bottled expressed breast milk in a container designated only for that child. Each bottle should be clearly labeled with the child's first and last name.
- Warm each child's bottle of breast milk in its own separate labeled container.
- Confirm each child's identity before feeding to prevent potential exposure to another mother's breast milk.

Staff prevention

- Wear gloves during the feeding if open cuts, sores, or cracked skin are present.
- Wash the area with soap and warm water as soon as possible, if breast milk is spilled on the skin. Once breast milk has been digested and spit up, there should not be any viable virus in it because of the enzymes in the child's digestive system.
- DO NOT rinse bottles that contained breast milk to prevent splashing of breast milk into your eyes.
- Clean up spilled breast milk. Wear gloves to clean the area, then sanitize the area.

Follow-up of exposures

- Inform the parents of the child who was given the wrong bottle that:
 - Their child was given another child's bottle of expressed breast milk.
 - They should notify their child's healthcare provider and ask about whether their child needs to have an HIV test.
 - The risk of HIV transmission is believed to be low.
- Inform the mother who expressed the breast milk that the bottles were switched and ask:
 - Will she give the other parents information on when the breast milk was expressed and how it was handled prior to being brought to the childcare center?
 - If she has been tested previously for HIV, would she be willing to share the results with parents of the child given the incorrect milk?
 - If not tested previously for HIV, would she be willing to be tested for HIV and share the results with the other parents?
- The risk of an infant becoming infected with HIV after one feeding of breast milk from an HIV positive mother is thought to be extremely low. Factors relating to the risk of spread are unknown, but may include:
 - repeated or prolonged exposure to breast milk
 - amount of HIV in the breast milk
 - infant exposure to blood while breast feeding (e.g., blood from a mother's cracked nipples)
 - the presence of mouth sores in the infant

BREAST MILK EXPOSURE

These conditions are less likely to occur in the childcare setting. Additionally, chemical properties in breast milk act together with time and cold temperatures to destroy HIV that may be present in expressed breast milk.

If a child has been given another child's bottle of expressed breast milk by mistake, the potential exposure to HIV should be treated the same way as an exposure to any other body fluid.

The risk to staff exposed to HIV from breast milk is very low because the risk of spread from skin/mucous membrane exposures is extremely low.

The following constitutes an exposure, if breast milk gets:

- Spilled onto cuts, breaks in the skin, or sores less than 24 hours old.
- Splashed into the eyes or mouth.

Modified from *What to do if an Infant or Child is Mistakenly Fed Another Woman's Expressed Breast Milk*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006.

For further information about breast milk storage or safe handling practices, please call your childcare health consultant. Questions about breast milk exposures call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.