Frequently Asked Questions

What is pasteurized human donor milk?
- Human milk that has been donated to a milk bank and pasteurized in a heat treatment process that eliminates harmful bacteria.
- The pasteurization process is similar to that used to ensure the safety of cow’s milk.
- Pasteurized donor milk goes through a rigorous testing process to ensure its safety.

Does pasteurization change breastmilk?
- Most of the unique nutrients and components (such as immune factors) found only in human breastmilk are retained after pasteurization.
- There are slightly lower levels of some nutrients, like protein and your baby’s growth will be carefully monitored.

How does the milk bank maintain high standards of quality?
The Rogers Hixon Ontario Human Milk Bank follows guidelines set by the Human Milk Banking Association of North America (HMBANA) and provincial regulations governing the handling, processing and storage of food.

Who will be offered donor milk?
- Fragile, hospitalized babies, including very low birth weight babies.
- In the event that donor milk supplies are limited, the highest risk babies will receive donor milk.

For more information, please talk with your baby’s Doctor, Nurse Practitioner, Lactation Consultant or Dietitian.
The Rogers Hixon Ontario Human Milk Bank

Every baby deserves a fighting chance. By collecting, pasteurizing and distributing donated human milk, the Rogers Hixon Ontario Human Milk Bank offers the extensive health benefits of human milk to the most vulnerable babies.

Through the generosity of milk donors, pasteurized human donor milk is provided by prescription to hospitalized babies to help protect them against serious illnesses and give them a healthier start.

The Rogers Hixon Ontario Human Milk Bank is a joint initiative of Mount Sinai Hospital, The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) and Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre. It is a non-profit organization and member of the Human Milk Banking Association of North America.

Breastmilk is the gold standard for infant nutrition.

To give babies the best start in life we encourage mothers to pump so their babies can receive mother’s own milk.

Benefits of Human Milk:

• It is easier to digest and better tolerated than formula.
• It coats and protects the digestive system and decreases the risk or severity of a severe bowel disease known as Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC).
• It provides immunological protection against serious infections.
• It provides for optimum growth and long term neurodevelopment.

Human Donor Milk:

If a mother does not have enough breastmilk to meet her baby’s needs while in hospital, pasteurized human donor milk may be available as a temporary supplement. (Parental consent is required before any baby can receive pasteurized human donor milk).

“Every parent wants the best start for their baby. When mothers own milk is not available, human donor milk offers the most fragile babies protection against life-threatening illnesses so that they can become stronger and healthier.”

Dr. Sharon Unger, Medical Director of The Rogers Hixon Ontario Human Milk Bank

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How long will babies receive donor milk?

• Every effort to feed the baby with mother’s own milk will be made prior to making the decision to use donor milk.
• When there is not enough of mother’s own milk, babies may receive donor milk for up to 4 weeks.
• At the end of the 4 weeks, if there is not enough of mother’s own milk, babies will be transitioned to an appropriate formula.

What are the risks of using donor milk?

• The baby’s growth will be monitored as some babies grow slower on donor milk, and may require nutritional supplementation.
• In decades of human milk banking worldwide, there have been no published reports of infectious diseases being caused by properly pasteurized human donor milk.
• The risk of infection, however slight, cannot be reduced to zero just as is the case with the use of blood products.

Who donates breastmilk?

• Healthy mothers who want to help babies in need. Often they are nursing their own baby and have extra milk.
• Women are only eligible to donate milk after passing an interview and screening blood work (similar to the process used for donating blood).

Does a mother receive payment for a milk donation?

No. Milk donations are strictly on a voluntary basis.