

MOTHERS' MILK ALLIANCE, Inc.

local wealth for local health

Mothers' Milk Alliance and COVID-19

3/25/2020

"The safest food in an emergency is the mother's own milk. Donor human milk is the next best option." ([United States Breastfeeding Committee](#), 03/2020) The immunological properties of human milk offer proven protections against many illnesses. Expert consensus at this time: the well-recognized benefits of human milk outweigh any potential risks of transmission of COVID-19.

On March 24, 2020, the State of Wisconsin issued an Emergency "[Safer at Home](#)" Order, requesting Wisconsin citizens to limit social interaction and travel to essential health and human services. Community processing and transportation of human milk is safeguarded under multiple sections: Healthcare and Public Health Operations, Human Service Operations, and Essential Activities.

Quality and Safety

Mothers' Milk Alliance (MMA) is carefully monitoring ongoing developments and guidelines regarding the outbreak of COVID-19 and how it relates to human milk sharing. MMA considers travel to obtain optimal food for your baby as essential travel and are continuing to facilitate safe sharing of human milk in Dane County.

MMA donors are rigorously screened by licensed midwives for medical and lifestyle risk factors, including national and international travel histories for donors as well as family members. Donors are screened through a written questionnaire, a verbal interview, and blood testing through MMA or their own medical practitioner for diseases that are transmissible through human milk. MMA does not accept milk from donors who have tested positive for COVID-19, with COVID-19 symptoms, or with known exposure to COVID-19 within the prior two weeks.

Mothers' Milk Alliance is an informed choice, shared responsibility model of milk sharing. Since MMA's founding in 2007, there has never been an incident of disease transmission or a negative health outcome in an infant who received donor human milk with the assistance of Mothers' Milk Alliance.

Transmission Through Human Milk

There is currently no evidence that COVID-19 can be carried in breastmilk.

"Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes, similar to how influenza (flu) and other respiratory pathogens spread." ([CDC](#), 2020)

While COVID-19 is a novel (new) virus and data is limited, characteristics of similar viruses such as SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) may be

significantly relevant and applicable to milk transmission. In limited studies including women with SARS, the virus has not been detected in breastmilk.

In a recent, but small study in China, a group of six mothers testing positive for COVID-19 were studied after giving birth. No evidence of the virus was found in their samples of breastmilk, cord blood, amniotic fluid or throat swabs of their newborns (Chen et al., 2020). However, there has not been enough research to conclude whether infected mothers can transmit the virus via breastmilk. Existing SARS and MERS research has demonstrated complete inactivation of these viruses through heat application. While MMA is not aware of research specific to COVID-19 inactivation and flash heat pasteurization, if you wish to practice stove-top pasteurization, MMA provides flash heat [guidelines here](#).

Safe Handling of Human Milk

Mothers' Milk Alliance has implemented the following guidelines to safeguard milk handling.

All donors and recipients are advised to:

- wash hands for a minimum of 20 seconds before pumping
- wipe down pump and all pump parts with [EPA-approved cleanser](#) before and after use
- wash hands and wipe bags with approved cleanser before handling bags of milk
- wash hands and wipe bags with approved cleanser before transport to MMA freezer
- wash hands and wipe bags with approved cleanser before and after thawing of milk
- blood draws will take place in an office or home space that has been wiped down with approved cleanser, under universal precautions and rules of social distancing (as possible), with no children present other than a babe in arms/carseat
- milk should be deposited in and picked up from coolers wiped between every transfer with an approved cleanser

MMA will continually monitor COVID-19 human milk guidelines.

All subsequent changes in guidelines and MMA practices will be posted on the [MMA Doc page](#).

SOURCES:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), [Pregnancy and Breastfeeding: Information about Coronavirus Disease 2019](#) (2020).

Human Milk Banking Association of North America, [Milk Banking and COVID-19](#) (03/2020).

Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, [Coronavirus infection and pregnancy: Information for pregnant women and their families](#) (2020).

United States Breastfeeding Committee, [Infant and Young Child Feeding in Emergencies, including COVID-19](#) (03/2020)