Human Donor Milk in the NICU

What is human donor milk?
The donor milk we use comes from milk banks with strict rules to ensure safety of the breast milk. The milk banks screen, pasteurize, test and freeze the human breast milk before they send it to our milk lab.

Why do some babies need human donor milk?
Some people who have just given birth may be waiting for their milk supply to increase. Others may not want to breast/chest feed or pump. Human milk can strengthen a baby's immune system. This helps the baby fight disease and infection. Human milk contains growth hormones to help babies grow and develop normally. Some babies may also digest human milk more easily than formula.

How is human donor milk used in the NICU?
Human donor milk is stored in the neonatal milk lab. Milk lab techs will thaw donor milk and measure it out, then they will deliver the bottles or syringes to your baby's room.

You may be pumping milk for your baby and using donor milk as a backup. The milk lab will pick up your pumped milk to prepare as many bottles or syringes as they can before using human donor milk.

If you have questions about how we prepare the milk or pick up times, please let your nurse or lactation consultant know. A milk lab tech will be happy to talk with you.

Your baby will no longer need human donor milk if your milk supply increases. Your baby's health care team and nutritionist will talk with you about when your baby will be ready to switch to formula if you are not pumping milk for your baby.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 3/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#8153.