

Storing Your Breast Milk

Data-driven recommendations from ParentData by Emily Oster

Before a bottle has been used ↓

On the counter 🌡️

Up to 8 hours

Safe for up to 8 hours at room temperature (77 degrees F and below) and likely up to 24 hours

In the refrigerator 🧊

4 days

No appreciable bacterial growth at 4 days of refrigeration. Data on longer periods is limited.

In the freezer ❄️

6-12 months

No bacterial growth found at 9 months. Main concerns are vitamin loss and taste changes.

After a bottle has been started ↓

Up to 8 hours on the counter and 24 hours in the refrigerator

After feeding from a bottle, bacterial growth appears minimal when stored in the fridge for up to 24 hours or at room temperature up to 8 hours.

QUICK FACTS

- Watch out for warm temperatures. Bacteria multiply faster when it's hotter, so it's best to store at room temperature (77 degrees F and below) or in the refrigerator.
- Mixing freshly pumped breastmilk into refrigerated breastmilk that hasn't been used (i.e., the pitcher method) is safe.
- These recommendations apply to healthy full-term babies. Consult a pediatrician if your baby is preterm, spent time in NICU, and/or you use donor milk

More data on breastfeeding at parentdata.org

Sources: 1. Hamosh, M., Ellis, L.A., Pollock, D.R., Henderson, T.R., & Hamosh, P. (1996, April 1). Breastfeeding and the working mother: effect of time and temperature of short-term storage on proteolysis, lipolysis, and bacterial growth in milk. 2. Peters, M. D., McArthur, A., & Munn, Z. (2016). Safe management of expressed breast milk: A systematic review. 3. Hernandez, J., Lemons, P., Lemons, J., & Todd, J. (1979, April 1). Effect of storage processes on the bacterial growth-inhibiting activity of human breast milk. 4. Ahrabi, A. F., Handa, D., Codipilly, C. N., Shah, S., Williams, J. E., McGuire, M. A., Potak, D., Aharon, G. G., & Schanler, R. J. (2016). Effects of extended freezer storage on the integrity of human milk. 5. Zychlinsky Scharff, A., Sedlacek, L., de Oliveira Mekonnen, A., Liolios, I., Ritter, S., Fuchs, F., & Happle, C. (2026, February 13). Leftover infant milk after bottle feeding: Parental practices and microbiological findings.