

Spoiler Alert for Buying Breast Milk Online

**By Reg P. Wydeven
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Last week I wrote about new laws that encourage schools to keep EpiPens on site to treat children with allergies. As a parent of a child with severe food allergies, I'm excited about these laws.

When our kids were born, my wife and I decided that she would nurse them. Because we both have lots of food and environmental allergies, we thought nursing would be a good idea. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in addition to reducing the chances of allergies, breastfeeding also reduces the chances of infections, asthma, obesity, diabetes and sudden infant death syndrome, or SIDS.

In addition, the DHHS claims that not only does breast milk have nutrients and antibodies, it is easier to digest than formula and has just the right combination of fat, sugar, water, and protein to help babies grow. It's also free. Breastfeeding also benefits the mother by reducing the risk of breast and ovarian cancer, plus it promotes weight loss.

Not all moms are able to nurse, however. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control does not advise breastfeeding if the mother has certain communicable diseases, is using illicit drugs, or is taking certain medications, including chemotherapy or radiation therapy for the treatment of cancer.

Many of these moms who cannot nurse still want their babies to reap the benefits of breastfeeding. Wet nurses used to be the only viable solution. Today, however, breast milk can be obtained at milk banks or even over the Internet.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration warns mothers that they should definitely consult with their pediatrician before choosing to feed their babies human milk not from themselves. The agency elaborates by explaining that the nutritional needs of each baby depend on many factors including the baby's age and health.

The obvious risks of feeding your baby breast milk from another woman are the same as why some mothers cannot feed their babies themselves, namely the milk may expose the baby to infectious diseases, illegal or prescription drugs. In addition, if not handled and stored properly, breast milk can become contaminated and unsafe to drink, just like cow's milk.

For these reasons, the FDA recommends that mothers do not feed their babies breast milk acquired directly from other individuals or through the Internet. Breast milk collected from other individuals or over the Internet is unlikely to have been properly collected, processed, tested or stored to reduce risk to the baby.

Instead, the FDA advises mothers wanting to feed their baby breast milk other than their own should obtain it only from a source that has screened its milk donors and taken other precautions to ensure the safety of its milk, such as a human milk bank. There are currently no federal regulations governing milk banks, and California and New York are the only states presently doing so.

This advice is even more poignant considering the recent study published in the journal Pediatrics. Researchers in the study bought and tested 101 breast milk samples sold by women on one popular website. The researchers discovered that 75% of the samples contained high amounts of bacteria that could potentially sicken babies, including salmonella. The website was not identified.

Breast milk can be extremely beneficial for babies, so I'm certainly not trying to sour anyone on using it. Just make sure it's safe.

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