

## Human Milk Bank Position Statement on Milk Sharing - March 2018

The sharing of breast milk has existed for thousands of years. It can be seen in the hieroglyphics from Egypt, the Muslim Quran and many other tribal oral histories. Milk kinship is as relevant today as it was in ancient scriptures.

The advent of the Internet has provided easier access for mother seeking breast milk so there is now an increasing market for sharing and selling breast milk. However the increasing profile of milk sharing does not necessarily make it a safer practice, just more accessible. The possibilities of adverse consequences are more consequential with breast milk sharing than might occur from milk dispensed from a milk bank.

The main risk is contamination with bacteria or viruses. These can occur naturally, such as cytomegalovirus, toxoplasmosis or herpes. Also if breast milk is not cleanly collected, stored or transported, there could be secondary contamination risks.

The Human Milk Bank is the only **pasteurised** milk bank in New Zealand currently and serves the babies in the Christchurch Neonatal Unit. Other informal milk banks dispense raw milk to mothers in the community. Each kind of milk bank has the responsibility of screening donors.

The Human Milk Bank **screens** its donors for lifestyle choices and serology testing to ensure no tested pathogens, medications, alcohol or smoking are part of the dispensed milk. Potential donors may be cleared for blood infections but excluded from donating because of medications that have commenced or identified after serology testing.

In this instance, potential donors are made aware of other forums available to them to discuss milk sharing because to do otherwise would be withholding information. The mothers are advised to disclose the reasons why they are unable to donate for the Human Milk Bank to any contacts they make through the forums. The Human Milk Bank has no further responsibility. The aim is to disseminate information to mitigate possible risks of milk sharing rather than not condoning the practice outright.

### **The Four Pillars of Safety for Mothers Considering Milk Sharing**

1. Informed Choice
2. Donor Screening
3. Safe Handling
4. Home Pasteurisation