Guidelines for Collecting, Storing, and Using Your Own Colostrum and Breastmilk

Hygiene

- Wash your hands and use a clean container.
- Wash equipment in hot soapy water, then rinse, or wash in a dishwasher.
- Air dry or use a paper towel

Collecting

- You can collect colostrum in late pregnancy, and after your baby is born. Colostrum begins changing to milk around the 3rd - 4th day after birth and is considered mature milk at around two weeks.

Storage

- Plastic, glass, silicone containers with an airtight seal, or syringes are all suitable.
- Label with date and time collected.
- Milk from different days/times can be combined once cooled.
- Store in small amounts, to avoid waste later.
  Room temperature (16–29C) 4 hours optimal, 6–8 hours under very clean conditions
  Refrigerator (~4C) 4 days optimal, 5–8 days under very clean conditions
  Freezer (<-4C) 6 months optimal, 12 months acceptable.

Thawing

- Use the oldest milk first.
- Thaw in the fridge or by putting the container in warm water.
- Don't use a microwave because it destroys some of the immune cells, and heats unevenly.
- Frozen milk that has been thawed for 24 hours will have less ability to inhibit bacterial growth so should not be left at room temperature for more than 2 hours.

Warming

- Place the container in warm (not hot) water.
- Swirl to mix in the cream, that will have risen to the top. This will also even out the temperature.
- Room temperature, or body temperature, is ideal. A few drops on the inside of your wrist will give you an idea of the temperature.

Feeding

- Feeding by spoon, cup, or tube at the breast, doesn't have the negative impact on breastfeeding that bottle/teat use can have.
- Discard left over milk after 1-2 hours[1]

Colostrum and breastmilk contain many unique properties including antioxidants, prebiotics, probiotics, hormones, enzymes, growth factors, stem cells, cancer fighting cells, many immune-boosting properties, and live cells that actively destroy bacteria. These are highly concentrated in the thick salty colostrum, and more dilute in the sweet mature milk. When a baby or child is unwell (or weaning) many of these properties become concentrated again. Many of these properties are still active after storage. Additionally, the enzyme Lipase's effect prevents the growth of microorganisms;

When refrigerated:

Many immune factors such as IgA, cytokines, and growth factors are just as active at 48 hours.
Cells that kill bacteria are still present (though reduced) at 72 hours.
Fat composition and lipase activity remains stable up to 96 hours.
Lactoferrin levels are stable for 4–5 days.
Bacterial growth remained at low levels at 8 days.

When frozen:

1-5 months - Vitamin C levels decrease.
3 months - Fat, protein, calories, lactoferrin and bioactivity decrease.
6 months - Several cytokines, IgA and growth factors remain stable.
9 months - macronutrients, osmolality, and immunoactive proteins remain unchanged.
Vitamin E appears stable over time.

Sourced from The Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine's 'ABM Clinical Protocol #8: Human Milk Storage Information for Home Use for Full-Term Infants, Revised 2017' DOI: 10.1089/bfm.2017.29047.aj

A recent 2026 German study 'Leftover Infant Milk After Bottle Feeding: Parental Practices and Microbiological Findings' shows milk is safe for much longer, especially for partially used bottles after feeding, challenging current guidelines.

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