

PUBLIC MOTHERS' MILK BANK



Héma-Québec's first Public Mothers' Milk Bank is now operational, providing breast milk to hospitals in Québec that care for extremely preterm infants. In opening this facility, Héma-Québec is further broadening its expertise in human-derived biological products.

Héma-Québec: A natural choice

Our organization:

- is a respected producer of regulated biological products;
- has the required infrastructure already in place;
- offers quality control and regular audits;
- implements stringent security measures;
- has a well-established distribution network.

A mothers' milk bank to save tiny lives

The milk supplied by the bank will be of particular benefit to premature babies born at 32 weeks' gestation or earlier who cannot be nursed by their mother. Donated milk will help reduce the risk of necrotizing enterocolitis, a serious neonatal intestinal disease that affects 5% to 6% of preterm infants.

A study has shown that some 3,700 litres of mothers' milk is required annually for these premature babies. This will entail the participation of approximately 300 donors a year to meet hospitals' needs (by comparison, 156,000 blood donors are required every year).

Give milk. Give life.



Who can donate?

Donor recruiting efforts are being carried out at the same time as registrations for the Public Cord Blood Bank with mothers-to-be who give birth at one of Héma-Québec's eight partner hospitals:

- St. Mary's Hospital Center
- CHU Sainte-Justine
- Royal Victoria Hospital
- CHUQ Centre mère-enfant
- Hôpital de la Cité-de-la-Santé, Laval
- Centre hospitalier de LaSalle
- Hôpital du Sacré-Coeur de Montréal
- Lakeshore General Hospital

Mothers who wish to donate their milk must:

- be nursing and able to produce surplus milk;
- be in good overall health;
- be non-smokers (nicotine gum use is not allowed);
- complete a questionnaire and provide a blood sample to qualify (and repeat the same process after six months).

Women who donate breast milk do so voluntarily, without any compensation. There are no minimums to meet, and the number-one priority remains their own nursing babies. Donors may withdraw from the program at any time.

What happens with collected milk?

Nursing mothers express and freeze their milk, then courier it to Héma-Québec at regular intervals. A collection kit, including bottles and a donor guide, is provided to every participant.

Potential donors are screened for viruses and diseases transmitted through breast milk.

Biochemical tests are conducted to assess nutritional value. The collected milk is then pasteurized to eliminate viruses and bacteria. It subsequently undergoes microbiological testing at an outside laboratory to ensure the pasteurization process has been effective and the product is bacteria-free. Supplies can be frozen and stored for up to one year.

The same distribution network already in place for blood products is used to deliver donated breast milk to the neonatal units that need it.

The only program of its kind in North America

Héma-Québec is the only organization in North America that uses the same facilities to prepare and process blood products and breast milk for distribution. A similar program exists in Spain. In Canada, there are three other breast milk banks currently in operation: one in Vancouver, one in Calgary and one in Toronto. Héma-Québec is therefore the fourth organization in the country to create a public mothers' milk bank.

