



Antenatal Colostrum Harvesting Guidance

Cardiff and Vale UHB Infant Feeding Team, 2021

From 36 weeks of pregnancy

Exclusive breastfeeding and avoiding early introduction of cows' milk (infant formula) has been shown to have many long-term health benefits for babies.

Hand expressing and "harvesting" of colostrum (the first breastmilk you produce) in late pregnancy does not enhance your ability to breastfeed but can provide some of your own colostrum if your baby needs it following birth. **Most babies do not need colostrum harvested antenatally.** Your community midwife can talk to you more about this.

Your baby will benefit from skin to skin contact with you immediately or as early as possible following birth. This will help regulate your baby's heart rate, breathing and temperature. Early (within the first hour), frequent and effective breastfeeding is also important. Occasionally, newborn babies who are at a higher risk of hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar levels) require glucose or formula milk in addition to breastfeeding in order to stabilise their blood sugar levels. If your baby does not feed effectively or baby's blood sugars are low, additional colostrum expressed antenatally may be used.

Babies who will benefit from antenatal expression of colostrum include:

- Babies with diagnosed cleft lip, Downs Syndrome, cardiac conditions
- Babies of mothers on anti-hypertensive medication
- Babies of diabetic mothers
- Babies of mothers having complex deliveries
- Premature babies
- Strong family history of dairy intolerance or inflammatory bowel disease.

Nipple stimulation may cause uterine contractions. Therefore, mothers at risk of premature labour, antenatal haemorrhage, placenta praevia or expecting babies with potential physical problems, should NOT express colostrum antenatally. Breast pumps are not used in pregnancy.

Equipment

1. Sterile oral 1-2ml (purple) **colostrum syringes** - you can buy these on the internet or if medically indicated ask clinic midwife for equipment.
2. A small sterile plastic collection container (if unable to obtain syringes)

Appendix 4 - Antenatal Colostrum Harvesting Guidance

3. A sheet of your hospital identification labels for syringes – add the date and time of collection.

Useful information and videos

Hand expressing video: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-video/>

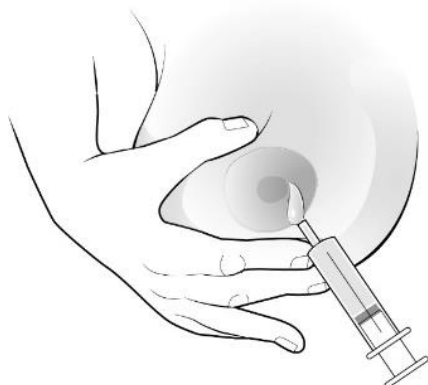
Expressing breastmilk information in Bump Baby and Beyond resource on line and in this leaflet: www.bumpbabyandbeyond.wales.nhs.uk

Hand expressing video: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/baby-friendly-resources/breastfeeding-resources/hand-expression-video/>

National Breastfeeding Network website for storage of breastmilk information: <https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/breastfeeding-help/expressing-storing/>

<https://www.laleche.org.uk/antenatal-expression-of-colostrum/>

Hand Expressing Colostrum



Hand expressing is easy once you have the knack of it and is the best method of expressing colostrum (first milk) in the first day or so after birth, if you need to encourage your baby to feed.

Have a clean, sterilised container ready before you start. Some mum's find that their milk flows more easily if they gently massage their breasts before expressing as this stimulates the breastfeeding hormones which create the milk supply. Cup your breast, work your thumb and forefinger back from the base of your nipple about 2cms (you might feel a different texture here).

Using your thumb and finger gently compress and release this area. It should not hurt. Compress and release in a steady slow rhythm but make sure you don't slide your fingers over the skin or this will hurt.

After a little while drops of milk may appear, if they do not your fingers are not quite in the right place so move them a bit (further back usually) and have another go. You will soon find the right spot for you and next time it will be easier and quicker.

If you express before your baby is three or four days old your milk will be very thick and sticky and you will only see a few drops – later the milk will be thinner and squirt out.

When the milk flow from this spot slows down move your finger like you are moving them around the face of a clock so that you express milk from all parts of your breast.

Ask staff to help you learn this skill- Maternity and NICU staff can help

A **well-fitting** breast pump may be useful following birth – once your full milk supply is established.

COMMON QUESTIONS ASKED BY MOTHERS

Is hand expressing difficult?

Hand expressing is easy to learn and will get easier with practice.

Can I use a pump instead?

Hand expressing is more effective than using a pump during pregnancy and for the first couple of days following birth until your full milk comes in. Colostrum may get stuck in the tubing if you use a pump. It is important that a breast pump fits well, ask for advice from maternity staff.

When can I start expressing?

From 36 weeks of pregnancy. Please confirm with your community midwife that it is safe for you to do.

How often do I need to express?

It is advisable to begin expressing for no longer than 3-5 minutes on each breast up to 3 times per day (you can store this in the same syringe).

How much colostrum will I express?

This varies from mother to mother. It may not seem a lot but a baby's first feed is no more than a teaspoon in the first 24 hours so every drop expressed is precious (liquid gold). Save all expressed colostrum, no matter how small.

If I cannot express any milk before giving birth does this mean I have no milk?

Not all mothers can express colostrum before giving birth. It is not an indication of your ability to produce breastmilk or your ability to breastfeed. *Don't worry if you express very little or nothing at all.*

How do I collect and freeze the expressed milk?

You can express directly into a syringe or sterile container and use a syringe to draw up the colostrum. Once you have expressed for the last time that day, label and date the syringe before putting it in the freezer. Colostrum can be frozen in the freezer compartment in a refrigerator for 2 weeks, a freezer compartment with separate door for 3 months and deep freeze (-18°C or lower) for 6 months.

How long can colostrum be safely refrigerated?

It can be safely refrigerated up to 3 days below 4 degrees Centigrade but ideally freeze as soon as possible.

When do I take the colostrum with me to the hospital?

We have very limited space for storing frozen colostrum/breastmilk therefore please only bring a small amount with you and to give it to the staff as soon as possible. It is advisable to store it in ice packs in a cool box between home and hospital to make sure it remains frozen. **Defrosted colostrum/breastmilk has a 12 hour shelf life after which it needs to be discarded.**