



Minnesota Milk Bank for Babies

Talking with Islamic Families about Pasteurized Donor Human Milk

Munira Maalimisaq, APRN, FNP

Linda Dech, MPH, IBCLC

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Disclosure:

Minnesota Milk Bank for Babies
is bronze level sponsor



Learning Objectives

1. Describe the findings from the Somali and African American focus group perinatal experiences study.
2. Explain the development of a community-based collaboration that addressed the use of pasteurized donor human milk in hospital NICUs with leaders of the Islamic faith.
3. Describe the outcomes of the collaboration leading to what is believed to be the first fatwa in the US regarding use of pasteurized donor milk for Muslim families.
4. List education resources available to Muslim families and health care providers about the use of pasteurized donor milk.
5. Identify ways to talk to Muslim families and address questions and concerns about the use of pasteurized donor milk.



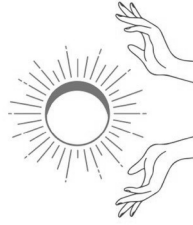
Photo by [Mujvadi](#) on Unsplash

Brighter Health MN: Munira Maalimisaq, CEO | info@brighterhealthmn.com or info@inspirechangeclinic.org

MDH WIC: Marcia McCoy | marcia.mccoy@state.mn.us

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Perinatal Experiences Study

Infant Feeding Practices Survey and Interviews

Interviews with providers in 2022

- Providers themselves aren't educated on donor milk
- Patients aren't given enough information to make an informed decision

"I think very few providers actually have an understanding of donor breast milk...we're hearing things like, it's really watered down, we don't know how many calories are in it, even though it's tested and labeled with the calories."

"To a family who doesn't have a lot of knowledge of donor breast milk, they just get put on formula [and] the doctor is like, Oh, they picked formula. And it's like really, you didn't give them the pros and cons of breast milk versus formula and give them true informed consent."

5

Interviews with providers in 2022

- Muslim families are concerned about kinship

Somali families oftentimes, are declining donor breast milk. And then when we dug further, we find out that it was due to like a religious thing where like there's concern of kinship.

- Muslim and non-Muslim families are concerned about safety

People feel uncomfortable, like, they don't know what the process is, they don't know that it would be just as beneficial as their own milk. They don't know that things can't be transmitted through [it]. So they're scared from not knowing.

6

Perinatal Experiences Study

Focus Groups conducted by Brighter Health MN, Fall 2023

- 28 Somali and 8 multigenerational Black American
- Metro and St. Cloud

Survey

- PRAMS questions on discrimination, hospital care

Goal

One goal of many: Ask about knowledge and perceptions regarding donor milk

7

Focus Group: Findings on donor milk

- Two participants were offered donor milk - one had twins who received donor milk
- Somali participants were not offered donor milk and almost all did not believe it was allowable in their religion
- Most participants had little or no knowledge of donor milk and had concerns about its safety

They were given pasteurized donor human milk and I was grateful. My milk eventually came in and I breast/pumped for them.

It is not something I would use for myself or family because of the kinship issue and not knowing who and what they are eating.

I never heard of it.
I would rather give a formula because the formula is safe. I have doubts if the person is sick or not, I don't know who donated the milk.

Convening with local Muslim Leaders



The Disparity

- Neonatologists noted hesitancy in the Minnesota Muslim community for using pasteurized donor human milk (PDHM) even when medically advised for premature and ill babies due in part to religious concerns about milk kinship and questions about the safety of PDHM.
- The Minnesota Breastfeeding Coalition (MBC) and Brighter Health convened a multi-disciplinary group of healthcare leaders including neonatologists, family nurse practitioners, nurses, the milk bank director, and MBC members

Convening and Discussion - Goals



- Increase familiarity of local Muslim leaders about the medical necessity of PDHM and the process of human milk banking
- Address Imams and scholars' questions and concerns about donor milk related to kinship and safety

Benefits of maternal milk for Preterm infants

The value of Human Milk is beyond being a source of nutrition

- Non-nutritional components (IgA, lactoferrin, lysozymes, **oligosaccharides-HMO**, long-chain fatty acids, cytokines, nucleotides, hormones, digestive enzymes and growth factors)
- Unparalleled Immunomodulatory, Anti-infectious and Anti-inflammatory properties

Reduces:

- Late onset sepsis
- **Necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC)** by > 50%

Improves:

- Neurodevelopmental outcomes (Vohr et al, 2007)
- Clinical feeding tolerance

Plus, all the health benefits for term infants.



Necrotizing Enterocolitis NEC

- Most common and devastating gastrointestinal emergency in premature infants.
- Intense inflammation and necrosis.
- 5-10 % LBW and 12% of VLBW <1500 gm will develop NEC – 30% will not survive.
- Survivors have significant morbidities including *neurodevelopmental impairment*.



Why Pasteurized Donor Human Milk?

Medical Benefits

Improved health outcomes in NICU:

- **Significant reduction in NEC by >50%**

(*Quigley and McGuire, Cochrane database, 2014, Cristafalo et al, 2013, DOMINO trial - O'Connor et al, 2018, Colaizy et al, 2024*)

- Other potential benefits: decreased TPN days, reduced late onset sepsis

All infants

- Improved feeding tolerance
- **Increased exclusive breastfeeding rates at discharge**
(*Kantorowska et al, 2018, Mannel R, 2018*)



Why Pasteurized Human Donor Milk?

Equity

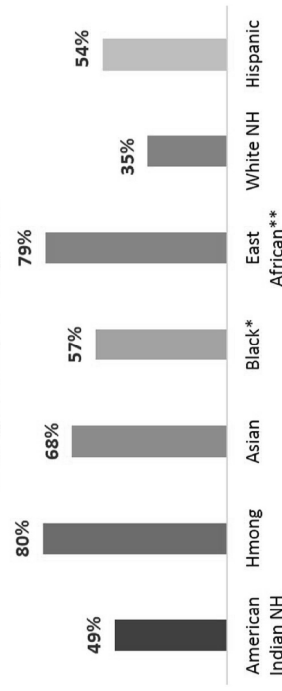
- Racial/ethnic disparity in rate of infants receiving PDHM—zip code data

- Systemic racism, implicit bias can affect PDHM offering and use in hospitals

- Family ability to pay for PDHM creates barriers to medically indicated PDHM

In-Hospital Formula Supplementation (Exclusive Breastfeeding Rates 20-65%)

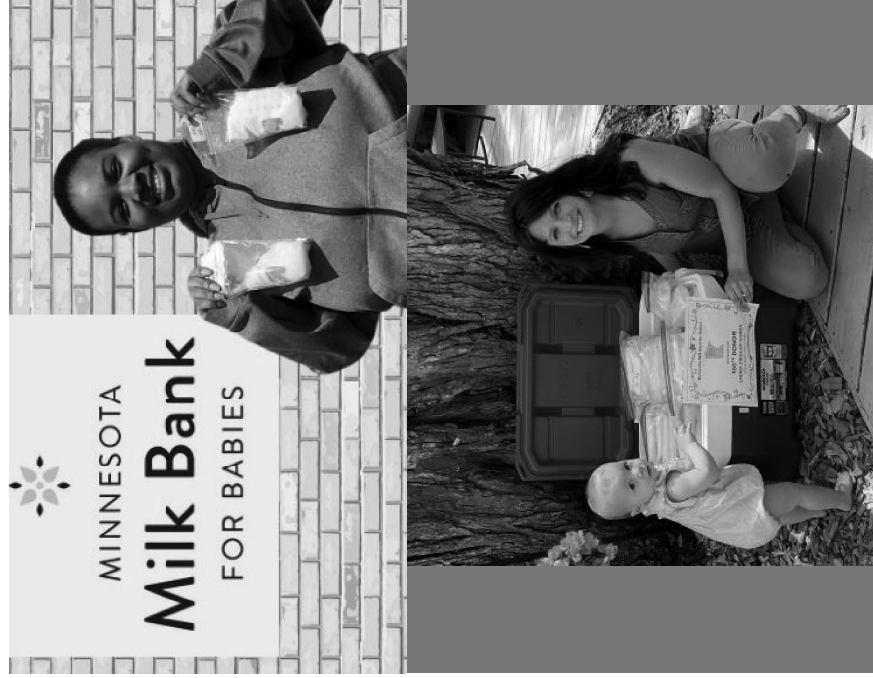
Figure 3. Breastfed Minnesota WIC infants given formula during the hospital stay, 2018



* Mother born in the United States, does not identify with another culture
** includes Somali, Sudanese, Ethiopian, Kenyan and Oromo

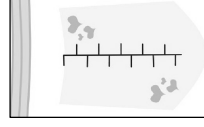
In Summary

- Human milk is the single most powerful intervention to optimize best health outcomes in all babies.
- ***Mother's own milk is always preferred.*** Priority needs to be given for helping moms express their breast milk.
- **Pasteurized human donor milk improves health outcomes and improves breast feeding rates** in preterm infants —reduces NEC and improves feeding tolerance and should be offered when mom's milk is unavailable or in low supply. *AAP: Policy Statement: Breastfeeding and the Use of Human Milk. Pediatrics 2012 and 2022*



The Process - Following the Milk

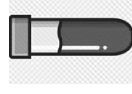
Donors



Extra Milk



Screening



Blood Test



Approval



The Process – Pooling, Bottling, Sealing

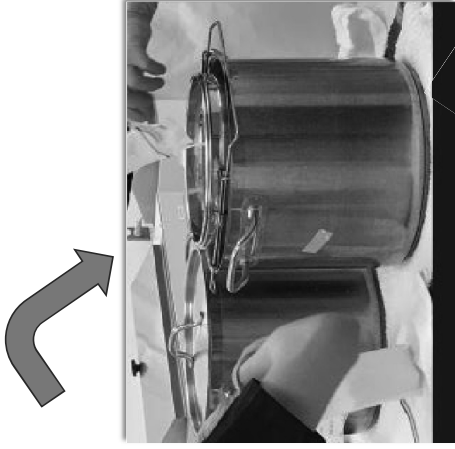
Donors



Multiple Donors

- Nutrition content
- Anti-infective properties

POOLING



Bottling & Sealing



The Process – Pasteurizing to Testing

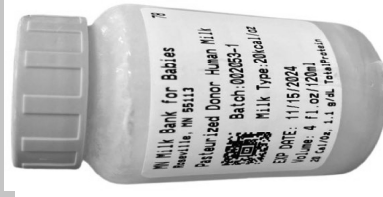
Pasteurizing



Cooling & Freezing



Testing



PDHM Priorities



Convening and Discussion – Goals Address questions and have an open discussion



- Elicit a ruling from Muslim scholars on the acceptability of PDHM for vulnerable infants.
- Share the ruling with hospitals, providers, community organizations and local media
- Develop education materials for use in hospital settings and the Muslim community

Islamic Fatwa on the Use of PDHM



Islamic Fatwa for Pasteurized Donor Breastmilk.
Brighter Health MN

S = **sahanJournal**

Media coverage

COMMUNITY EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT HEALTH IMMIGRATION



Shukri Jumale attended the fatwa at Children's Hospital in Minneapolis. Credit: Dymnah Chihoun Credit: Dymnah Chihoun | Sahan Journal

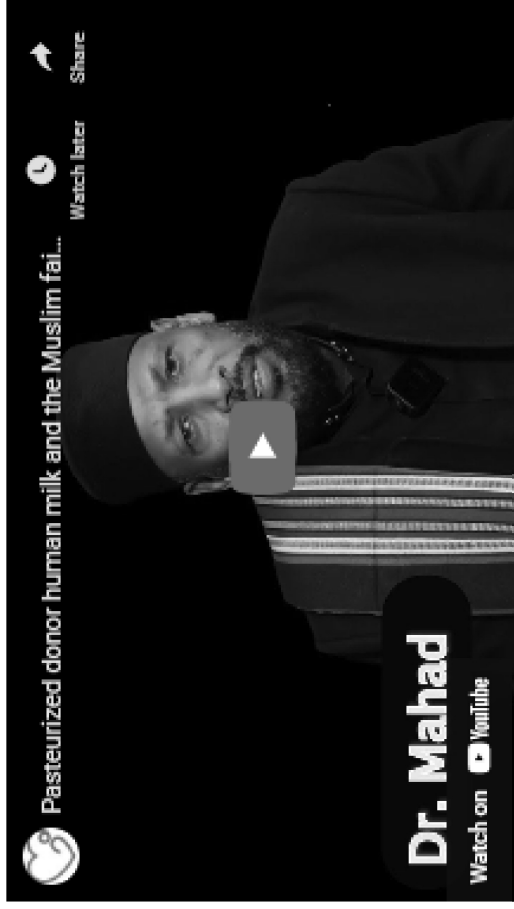
The Minnesota Breastfeeding Coalition recently helped organize a fatwa, or religious clarification, on Islamic women using donor breast milk. Islamic families had expressed some hesitance to use donor breast milk, so representatives of several organizations, including the coalition, Children's Minnesota, M Health Fairview, the Minnesota Milk Bank for Babies, and Brighter Health, met with religious scholars in the Twin Cities. On Nov. 16, the Minnesota Islamic Council officially issued the fatwa, encouraging the use of pasteurized donor breast milk for babies when their mother's milk is not available. "Islam has many verses in the Qur'an and other texts that document the importance of breast milk, whether from the birth mother or shared milk," said Mohamed Mahad, the imam who signed the fatwa.

Breastfeeding advocacy grows in Minnesota communities of color. (sahanjournal.com)

First-of-its-kind Islamic fatwa issued encouraging the use of pasteurized donor breast milk for Muslim babies in the hospital | Children's Minnesota (childrensmn.org)

Education Resources - Videos

Below is a video about the development of the fatwa in English. Translations of the video are available in Somali and Arabic.



Education resources - Handout

HANDOUTS

An educational handout about pasteurized donor milk for Muslim families was developed for use in the **public domain**. You are welcome to download, print, and use this handout unaltered for non-commercial use in your facility. Space was provided in the lower right corner to add your facility's logo.

PDF available in English, Somali and Arabic.

VIDEOS

In English, Somali and Arabic

FAQs

WEBINAR

How to talk to Muslim families about PDHM

About Pasteurized Donor Human Milk

For Families of Islamic Faith

This fact sheet is for families of the Islamic faith who have questions about donor breast milk (pasteurized donor human milk). Sometimes, mothers can't make all the milk their baby needs. Using donor breast milk is one of the best ways to give your new baby a healthy start in life.

What is pasteurized donor human milk?

This is milk from healthy mothers who freely give their extra breast milk to milk banks to help other babies. "Pasteurized" means that the milk is heated to remove harmful germs that can make babies sick.

The milk is safe even for tiny, sick, or very young babies. In many cases, donor milk can save a baby's life.

What do Islamic leaders say about pasteurized donor human milk?

Islamic leaders have issued a fatwa, based on talks with the Minnesota Islamic Council and medical experts. Here's what the Fatwa says about pasteurized donor human milk:

- Babies should have donor milk when they can't get their own mother's milk, or when their own mother's milk isn't enough.
- It's very important for babies born before 37 weeks, who are sick, or who have low birth weight.

- In Islam, milk sharing is a virtue.
- Kinship would be very unlikely, because the milk is a mix from several mothers. This keeps babies from getting a lot of milk from a single donor.

Is the milk safe for my baby?

Yes! Trained healthcare workers carefully interview and test donor mothers. This keeps chances of milk having disease, illness, drugs, or alcohol very low. They also test the milk for safety and nutrition. The US has very strict rules about how milk is pasteurized and stored in milk banks. In fact, rules for donating milk are stricter than rules for donating blood.

Don't worry about your baby getting pork products through donor milk. Pork is fully broken down in the donor mother's stomach and does not reach the milk.

How does pasteurized donor human milk protect my baby's health?

- Your baby will be better protected from infections, even life-threatening ones.
- Your baby's body digests donor milk better than formula.
- Donor milk helps protect your baby's gut and can prevent a severe disease called NEC (necrotizing enterocolitis).

This material is designed for general information only and should not be used as a substitute for medical advice from a healthcare provider.

Education Resources



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FATWA

Regarding the use of pasteurized donor human milk in the Muslim faith

The Minnesota Milk Bank for Babies (MMBB) collaborated with local Muslim leaders and scholars, Children's Minnesota and M+Health Fairview neonatologists, Minnesota Breastfeeding Coalition (MBC) members, and Brighter Health Minnesota community health leaders, to foster a dialogue leading to the first US fatwa (a formal ruling or interpretation of Islamic law) supporting the use of pasteurized donor human milk for Muslim babies. This initiative developed to address a health disparity seen in hospital NICUs and to ensure that all premature infants have access to the best nutrition available. The fatwa is available to read on Brighter Health Minnesota's site at, [Islamic Fatwa for Pasteurized Donor Breastmilk](#).



[Fatwa for donor milk - mnmilkbank.org](#)

[Videos, Patient Education Handout, FAQs](#)

Focus groups: Unmet needs

- Need for more prenatal education
- Need for more education/guidance on milk supply and on pumps
- Language was a barrier to support and education

I learned a lot today about the importance of breastfeeding. I wish I had access to the same information when I was pregnant even if I had other kids before.

I needed education about what could help me increase my milk supply.
How to use a pump. They gave me one and I don't know how to use it.

Language was a barrier when it came to education. Interpreter was biased too - and told me about free formula I can get.

Focus groups: Unmet needs

- Need for more breastfeeding support postpartum

I think I got a lot of help when I was delivering the baby. What was missing was that, after I had the baby, I had no help.

I think in the hospital, hell, there was no help there. There was no one, there like, sitting next to me like, OK, I know this is hard, but you must keep trying and it will get easier.

- There was a desire for providers who 'look like me' or can speak their language

This is what you need to do, but there is no one there... showing you or helping you through it. It would have been a lot different 100% today [if] I had providers that looked like me and would have helped so much. I was scared.

Talking with Muslim families about BF & PDHM

- Culturally sensitive training for staff is a MUST
- Be kind and inquisitive
- Understand Patient Profile
 - Muslims immigrants- 1st generation vs 2nd/3rd generation
 - American Muslims- Culture vs religion
- Create a script for introducing the fatwa "Our medical recommendation is for PDHM, I understand your religious concerns about giving this to your baby. Have you heard about the recent fatwa on this topic? Here are resources I have for families..."
- Listen to family concerns and direct them to what resources you have

Lessons Learned

- **Collaboration involving the Muslim community organizations and the Minnesota Islamic Council:** using trusted community members and providers to understand the beliefs of Muslim families, approaching community and religious leaders to address and develop a solution to barriers, and co-designing educational materials with community partners.
- **Develop a multi-institution joint agreement that allowed collaboration:** The agreement with the University of MN/ MHealth Fairview, Children's Minnesota Hospital, the MBC, and MMBB - shared vision to make this life-saving work available to all families
- **Involve communications for media coverage.**
- **Develop culturally appropriate patient/family materials:** Listening to Muslim faith leaders who gave their insights on how to share this fatwa with their community and showed their support by participating in the creation of videos for a primarily spoken language culture.

Future directions

- Quantitative analysis of pre and post usage of PDHM by families of Muslim faith after issuing of Fatwa and implementing education
- Ongoing dissemination of information and education
- Identifying and addressing barriers
- Always needed – methods to improve breastfeeding support!

Questions?

Munira Maalimisaq

Info@inspirechangeclinic.org

Linda Dech

Linda.Dech@mnmilkbank.org

763-290-1860

