

still good?

Are you always digging a bottle or jar out of the fridge and wondering uneasily if it's still okay to feed your baby? Here, a no-fuss food safety guide

by Cynthia Stevens Graubart and Catherine Fliegel, R.N.

photographs by Gregor Halenda

BREAST MILK

how long you can keep it

At room temperature (66–72°F) The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends no longer than one hour, but the La Leche League says research shows that room-temperature breast milk is safe to drink for up to ten hours.

In a refrigerator The AAP recommends two to three days, but the La Leche League says up to eight days is safe.

In a freezer compartment inside a fridge Up to two weeks.

In a freezer compartment with a separate door The AAP recommends up to one month, but the La Leche League says three to four months is safe.

In a separate deep freeze Up to six months.

breast milk safety secrets

■ Should you go with the more conservative or the more liberal time estimates? "It's largely up to the parents and what they feel comfortable with," says Jennifer Shu, M.D., coauthor of the AAP book *Heading Home With Your Newborn*. Many pediatricians, she says, offer milk storage recommendations somewhere in between the two extremes. **What that means for you:** You don't have to stress out if you're forced to leave your milk out of the fridge for a few hours, but, says Dr. Shu, "if you have any concerns about freshness, it's best to err on the side of caution, especially when it comes to premies or newborns."

■ Label each container of milk with the date it was stored.

■ Store the milk in the back of the fridge or freezer to minimize its exposure to warm air when you open the door.

■ Freeze about two to four ounces per container. Leave a little room at the top of the container to allow for expansion.

■ Thaw frozen milk slowly in the fridge for no more than 24 hours or in a bowl of warm water.

■ Never refreeze thawed milk.

■ Don't save milk left over from a feeding to use another time; germs from your baby's mouth can contaminate the milk.

to sterilize or not to sterilize

GEAR: Most experts will tell you to sterilize all your bottles, storage containers, nipples, rings, caps, and measuring cups at least before the first use by heating them in boiling water for five minutes. But many veteran moms (including a few *Babytalk* editors) skip this step and just run them through the dishwasher. Another good option: Medela sells Quick Clean Micro-Steam Bags that allow you to sterilize your stuff in the microwave in just three minutes. If there are concerns about your local water supply, though, your doctor may recommend sterilizing the gear after each use.

WATER: Your pediatrician may suggest that you boil the water you use to mix formula for the first few months to be safe, but others say not to worry about it unless you have well water or concerns about your local water supply. (Since your pediatrician will know about the quality of the water in your area, follow her recommendation.) To sterilize tap water, bring it to a boil for just one minute and let it cool down before mixing it with formula. You can buy sterilized bottled water, but bottled water is not sterile in general, so it's no better than tap in most cases. >