



SPECIAL ARTICLE

Recommendations for the creation and operation of maternal milk banks in Spain^{☆,☆☆}

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Abstract It is widely agreed that the best source of nutrition for the newborn is the milk of their own mothers. In those cases where it is not available, especially in very premature and/or very low birth weight infants, as well as other sick newborns, the preferred choice before formula is human milk provided by selected donors. This indication is supported by the highest international bodies dedicated to the health of the child population, including the World Health Organisation as well as the main national and international scientific societies in the field of Paediatrics.

Milk banks are health institutions responsible for the collection, processing and distribution of donated human milk. Currently, there are 14 human milk banks operating in Spain, grouped in the Spanish Association of Human Milk Banks, created in September 2008.

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In order to homogenise the criteria and to unify the working methods of the different milk banks, the Spanish Association of Human Milk Banks has developed standards to harmonise the protocols, and to serve as a guide for the start-up of new milk banks in the Spanish territory. These standards, set out in the present article, range from the donor selection and the evaluation process to the collection, processing, storage, and distribution of donor human milk.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Banco de leche materna; Leche materna donada; Pasteurización; Enterocolitis necrosante; Prematuro de bajo peso; Prematuro de extremo bajo peso

Recomendaciones para la creación y el funcionamiento de los bancos de leche materna en España

Resumen La mejor alimentación para un recién nacido es la leche de su propia madre. En aquellos casos en los que esta no está disponible, especialmente en los recién nacidos muy prematuros o de muy bajo peso al nacer, así como en otros recién nacidos enfermos, el alimento de elección es la leche materna de donantes seleccionadas, antes que la fórmula artificial. Esta indicación está respaldada por los máximos organismos internacionales dedicados a la salud de la población infantil, como la Organización Mundial de la Salud, así como las principales sociedades científicas nacionales e internacionales en el ámbito de la Pediatría.

Los bancos de leche surgen como instituciones sanitarias responsables de la gestión de las donaciones, del procesamiento y de la distribución de leche materna donada. Actualmente existen 14 bancos de leche materna en España, agrupados en la Asociación Española de Bancos de Leche Humana, creada en septiembre de 2008.

Con el fin de homogeneizar los criterios y unificar los métodos de trabajo, la Asociación Española de Bancos de Leche Humana ha elaborado unos estándares para armonizar los protocolos de los diferentes bancos y para que sirvan de guía para la puesta en marcha de nuevos bancos de leche en el territorio español. Dichos estándares, presentados en este artículo, abarcan desde el proceso de selección y evaluación de la donante hasta la recogida, el procesamiento, el almacenamiento y la distribución de leche materna de donante.

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Introduction

Human milk is a collection of essential nutrients and bioactive components that facilitate the transition from intrauterine to extrauterine life and the subsequent growth of the infant. It not only meets the infant's nutritional needs, but also promotes the maturation of several organs, such as the intestines and the brain.^{1,2} When the infant's own mother's milk is unavailable, the best alternative is donated human milk (DHM), collected and processed in human milk banks (HMBs). This is recommended by numerous scientific associations and international institutions.³⁻⁵ In 2005, the Asociación Española de Pediatría (Spanish Association of Paediatrics)^{6,7} recommended the creation of at least one HMB in each autonomous community.

Human milk banks are health care institutions whose mission is to collect, process, store and distribute DHM under the highest quality and safety standards. The main beneficiaries are very preterm or very low birth weight newborns, in whom the literature has described improved outcomes with DHM feeding versus formula feeding in terms of a reduced incidence of infection, necrotising enterocolitis and retinopathy of prematurity, better long-term neurodevelopmental outcomes, and a higher tolerance to the introduction of enteral feeding.⁸⁻¹⁰

The first HMB was created in Vienna in 1909, and at present there are nearly 1000 worldwide, including 214 in Europe (<http://www.europeanmilkbanking.com>). In Spain, the first HMB opened in 2001 in the Balearic Islands, and another 13 banks have been established since in 12 autonomous communities (Balearic Islands, Madrid, Valencia, Catalonia, Andalusia, Aragón, Extremadura, Castilla y León, Galicia, Asturias, Basque Country and Cantabria).

In Spain, the distribution of DHM has increased from 774 L given to 333 recipients in 2009 to 4937 L given to 2281 recipients in 2016 (<http://www.aeblh.org>). There is also evidence that the creation of new HMBs is associated with increases in breastfeeding rates at hospital discharge. The current evidence demonstrates that HMBs and the availability of DHM promote and support breastfeeding.^{11,12}

Several countries have developed national guidelines to standardise the criteria applied to HMBs.¹³⁻¹⁷ Based on these guidelines and on customary practice in Spanish HMBs, and through a consensus process involving the banks currently operating in Spain, the Asociación Española de Bancos de Leche Humana (Spanish Association of Human Milk Banks) has developed standards to be used as reference for the establishment and operation of HMBs in our country in order to ensure the safety and quality of the distributed DHM.

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