

Milk Banking in South Africa

In South Africa Milk banks existed informally in many hospitals, but these were also closed as a result of HIV/AIDS as donors were not screened and milk was not pasteurised before it was administered to infants. The discovery that the Holder Method of pasteurisation killed the HIV virus, resulted to milk banks again opening, but with strict screening procedures for donor mothers and the pasteurisation of all donor milk.

In 2000 Prof. Anna Coutsooudis, from the Department of Paediatrics at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, started the iThemba Lethu Breast Milk Bank in Durban to feed babies orphaned or abandoned as a result of HIV. UNICEF provided money for the first pasteuriser and while adoptive families were sought, these babies received donor milk and this made a remarkable difference in the quality of their lives. An evaluation of the impact of donor milk for vulnerable orphans was conducted in 2018 and it was shown to have a positive impact – see attached manuscript:

<https://piastra.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Doc-2-iThemba-Lethu-research-Using-donor-milk-for-vulnerable-infants.pdf>

Reimers P, Shenker N, Weaver G, Coutsooudis A. Using donor human milk to feed vulnerable term infants: a case series in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Int Breastfeed J. 2018 Sep 10;13:43. doi: 10.1186/s13006-018-0185-6. PMID: 30214466; PMCID: PMC6131835.

Prof. Coutsooudis then assisted with the establishment of milk banking in the Western Cape (Milk Matters) in 2001/2 and then breast milk banking in Gauteng (South African Breast Milk Reserve).

Who regulates Human Milk Banking in South Africa?

The Department of Health has promulgated regulations which will control Human Milk Banks. Human milk is classed as a tissue and as such will be governed by the Human Tissue Act 65 of 1983.

