

Mothers' Milk Bank of Alabama Aims to Improve Infant Mortality Rates and Health Outcomes for Alabama's Most Vulnerable Babies.

The Human Milk Banking Association of North America (HMBANA) in Partnership with the Mothers' Milk Bank of Alabama (MMBAL) Provides Safe Donor Human Milk When Mothers' Own Milk is Not Available

Fort Worth, Texas (PRWEB) December 7, 2016—New data from the Alabama Department of Public Health, Center for Health Statistics reveal an infant mortality crisis in Alabama. **In 2015 the overall infant mortality rate in Alabama fell to 8.3 deaths per 1000 live births.** However, **the rate for African American infants rose to an all time high of 15.3 deaths per 1000 births.** African American babies are dying at more than three times the rate of white babies in Alabama.

African American mothers and babies are disproportionately impacted by adverse birth outcomes and are further impacted by challenges and barriers to breastfeeding as a result of historical trauma, poverty and structural inequities that contribute to health inequity. Mothers of preterm infants often need time for their body to adapt to the realities of the early birth to fully meet their babies' nutritional needs. **The use of donor milk (milk donated by lactating women for infants other than their own) is central to infant medical care.** With rare exception, **human milk is the best first food for infants** and young children—including premature and sick newborns. When mothers' own milk is not available, provision of pasteurized, screened donor human milk is the next best option, and soy- or cows' milk-based manufactured formula a last resort.

Dr. Joshua Johannson, MD and founder of the Cheaha Women's Health and Wellness Center in Anniston, Alabama is a strong proponent of hospitals making donor human milk a key component of support for pre-term babies when mothers own milk is not available, **"We are very fortunate to have a non-profit milk bank in Alabama that works within our communities to insure our hospitals have donor human milk to meet the nutritional needs of babies born pre-term, increasing their health and survival."**

Research has shown that **exclusive human milk feeding of premature babies (< 1500 gms; 3.3 lbs) significantly reduces the incidence of Necrotizing Enterocolitis (NEC)** and use of formula (even specialized premature formula) increases the incidence of NEC. NEC is a serious gastrointestinal infection affecting about 10% of all premature babies. Treatment of NEC accounts for 19% of all initial newborn health care costs nationwide; and surgical NEC is the leading cause of death in the preterm population. American taxpayers pay more for NEC than any other complication of prematurity, with severe cases averaging 62 days hospitalization and \$300,000 per patient. The frequency that Black infants are diagnosed with NEC is significantly higher than that of other races. **Infants' risk of NEC is more than doubled by lack of access to human milk,** as is their risk of increased NEC severity. For these and other medically fragile infants, irrefutable evidence now underscores the necessity of donor human milk to ensure stable growth and survival.

Mothers' Milk Bank of Alabama (MMBAL) started pasteurizing donor milk for Alabama in 2015 and is one of the newest milk banks in the United States, providing safe, donor human milk for babies with medical need. **Katherine Wood**, Executive Director of the Mothers' Milk Bank says, **"Donor mothers who have extra milk to give trust Mothers' Milk Bank of Alabama to make sure their precious milk gets to the babies most in need across our state. We are so proud to work with our donors to help these babies and their families."**

The Human Milk Banking Association of North America (HMBANA) accredits the Mothers' Milk Bank of Alabama. Since 1985, HMBANA member milk banks operate under a set of rigorous evidence-based guidelines for donor recruitment, safe screening, processing and distribution of donor human milk for the most vulnerable babies.

HMBANA (the accreditation and oversight body for all nonprofit milk banks in North America) takes the position that accepting milk donations from carefully screened volunteer donors is the most ethical way to ensure that milk donations will be shared with the most critically ill infants. Through following the nonprofit model of milk banking, HMBANA milk banks prioritize infant health when distributing donor milk to infants with medical need.

HMBANA milk banks follow procedures based on scientific evidence and recommendations from the FDA and CDC. All milk banks affiliated with HMBANA follow the same rigorous standards for screening, processing and distributing donor human milk to fragile infants, which has saved the lives of countless infants and provided support for their families and built strong relationships with as a key part of the public health infrastructure of the community.

About Human Milk Banking Association of North America

In 2015, HMBANA's 24 member milk banks dispensed 4.3 million ounces of lifesaving donor human milk to critically ill hospitalized infants in all 50 states and most of Canada. Visit www.hmbana.org for more information about HMBANA and member milk bank locations. Contact Information-Mothers' Milk Bank of Alabama + (205) 942.8911.

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