

Breast milk purchased online contains caffeine and tobacco, but no illicit drugs

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In the latest update on the testing of breast milk samples purchased online, researchers found that no samples appeared to be contaminated with illicit drugs.

Dr. Sarah Keim's team at Nationwide Children's Hospital purchased and tested 102 samples of [breast milk](#) advertised on a milk-sharing website in 2013. It was widely reported then that they found high levels of potentially harmful bacteria in the breast milk they bought online, and that 10 percent of the samples contained cow's milk, which could be harmful to infants.

"The majority of sellers indicated in their advertisements that they abstained from at least some kinds of drugs, although many statements about being 'drug free' were too vague to determine whether the women meant [illicit drugs](#), pharmaceuticals or both," said Dr. Keim, principal investigator for The Research Institute at Nationwide Children's. "We tested for commonly abused drugs, but larger future studies are needed to confirm our findings and to test for a greater range of drugs. From all our collective studies of breast milk purchased on the internet, we conclude that buying breast milk online is still unsafe."

The study, published in the November issue of Breastfeeding Medicine, explains that samples were tested at U.S. Drug Testing Laboratories for 13 individual drugs that are among the most commonly abused by women of reproductive age, and many are unsafe for infant exposure: amphetamines, barbiturates, benzodiazepines, buprenorphine,

cannabinoids, cocaine, meperidine, methadone, opiates, oxycodone, phencyclidine, propoxyphene and tramadol.

This issue of Breastfeeding Medicine includes another publication by the team at Nationwide Children's and their collaborators from The Ohio State University and Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, which showed four of the 102 tested samples contained high levels of cotinine – a chemical compound present in the breast milk as a result of active smoking or secondhand smoke.

"When a seller is purchasing something like breast milk on the Internet, they have no way of knowing for certain what they are getting or if the person on the other end of the interaction is being honest with them, especially when there is a financial incentive," explained Dr. Keim, also a faculty member at The Ohio State University College of Medicine.

"Many women who are selling extra milk online genuinely want to help out another family, and we recommend those women donate their milk to a milk bank."

This study also reported almost universal caffeine consumption among sellers of breast milk on the Internet, yet only a 12 of the advertisements even mentioned caffeine. Caffeine is rapidly transferred into human milk and has shown to cause irritability and poor sleeping patterns in infants of women who have ingested large amounts.

"Moderate amounts of caffeine do not prohibit women from donating breast milk to a milk bank," said Dr. Keim. "However, we found a significant number of families seeking milk on the Internet had children with an identified medical condition, and [human milk](#) containing chemicals like caffeine and tobacco could have problematic effects on any infant, particularly those most vulnerable."

Provided by Nationwide Children's Hospital

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