



# ECRI Institute's PSO Monthly Brief

September 2015

## What Happens When Breast Milk Gets Mixed Up?

The risk of a breast milk “mix up” is higher than you might expect—especially when you consider the amount of expressed breast milk feedings that occur per day across all hospitals in the country. A [webinar presented to members by ECRI Institute PSO](#) (login required) detailed the related risks and potential mitigation strategies to help prevent feeding breast milk from one mother to another mother’s infant.

Breast milk can carry bloodborne pathogens and may transmit them to the infant. When an infant is fed milk from another mother, the involvement of infection control may be required, as may venipuncture. Such an event may be stressful for all involved.

Of all such events reported to ECRI Institute PSO in 2013 and 2014, another mother’s milk was given to infants in 61%, the error was caught before the breast milk was given to the baby in 31%, and the remaining 8% were unsafe conditions (e.g., poorly organized milk storage fridges).

One common theme noted by ECRI Institute PSO in such occurrences is the identification and verification of the expressed breast milk—either via visual confirmation of the label and mother’s identification band, or via bar-code system.

### What to do after a mix up

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers a [list of steps that should be taken](#) when an infant is mistakenly fed another mother’s milk. First, the provider should inform the mother who expressed the milk and determine when it was expressed, if she has been tested for HIV, and if she would be willing to be tested and share the results with the parents of the infant fed her milk. The provider should then discuss the incident with the involved infant’s parents and provide the information from the involved mother.

### Reduce the risk of a mix up

[Strategies that help reduce the risk](#) of such a mix up include keeping infants and their mothers together unless clinically indicated, and implementing a “high-reliability process” for identifying mothers and infants when they are separated.

When the mother is expressing breast milk, labels should be provided for her to time and date for each bottle of milk. Labels should be reviewed for accuracy and reconciled with the baby or mother’s information when the bottles are stored and again before administration.

[Contact us](#), and let us demonstrate how we can give you the tools to reduce the risk of such mix ups.

## Are you making alarm safety a top priority?

Think your alarm safety practices are just fine? Think a patient could never die under your watch? So did some of the largest health systems in the country—until they had to call us about an unfortunate alarm event.

Don't let your hospital be next. ECRI Institute is here to help you meet the Joint Commission's January 1, 2016, National Patient Safety Goal on clinical alarms. Request an independent review of your [alarm readiness](#), and get a clear picture of where your hospital really stands on alarm safety.

### ECRI Institute's 22nd Annual Conference

[Cancer Care Delivery in a Rapidly Changing Healthcare System](#)—ECRI Institute, the National Cancer Institute, and many other supporters invite you to this free public service conference that will examine the current status of key areas in cancer care delivery. The Nov. 17-18 conference will focus on understanding where we are now and whether we are on the right paths forward.

### ECRI Institute is Hiring!

Are you seeking employment with an organization that focuses on improving healthcare and values and respects its staff? We are actively looking for patient safety and risk management experts for several positions. [Learn more.](#)

### Patient Safety Center

**World-class research, guidance, and tools made available to the public.**

ECRI Institute is committed to patient safety, as it is the key element of our mission. The [Patient Safety Center](#) contains publicly available free resources to help all healthcare providers improve the quality and safety of the care they provide.

### Sign Up for Our Other Newsletters

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