Position statement

**Wet-nursing**

Although wet-nursing, the practice of a woman breastfeeding another woman's baby, or cross feeding, is not common in the UK, some women do informally feed other women's babies.

Some people may find the subject of wet-nursing uncomfortable. This could have something to do with lack of familiarity, or with issues around intimacy with another woman's baby; some mothers may feel that breastfeeding is a special relationship between her and her baby only.

There is no legal reason however why women who wish to wet nurse or use a wet nurse cannot do so, and NCT believes that women setting up an agreement between themselves to do this should be supported in their decision.

A mother whose baby is latching on well and who is breastfeeding responsively will generally be able to produce enough milk to nourish two, three or more babies. NCT believes that wet-nursing can be an ideal way for women who, for whatever reason, do not breastfeed their babies to give them breastmilk rather than using formula milk. Well-documented research has shown that breastmilk protects from infections and diseases and promotes babies’ growth. Breastmilk also protects babies’ future health as it is associated with a lower risk of obesity, allergies and diabetes.

Another opportunity for babies to have another mother’s milk is through human milk banks. A network of milk banks operates in the UK; however the breastmilk donated to these banks is exclusively used for premature or sick babies as these babies need it most. Milk banks screen the donating mothers and their milk for infections such as hepatitis and HIV and pasteurise the milk.

NCT has called for a wider network of milk banks in the UK. We encourage women who want to support them or donate milk and give them information to do so.

Background information to this position statement

For further information about milk banks in the UK, go to: [www.ukamb.org/home.htm](http://www.ukamb.org/home.htm)

NICE guidance on the use of donated human breast milk in preterm babies is being formulated (due out in 2010). For more details go to: [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/index.jsp?action=byID&o=11973](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/index.jsp?action=byID&o=11973)