

UAMS News Bureau

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UAMS Opens First Milk Bank in Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK — The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) opened the UAMS Milk Bank, the first facility of its kind in Arkansas, during a Sept. 6 ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Located in the Monroe Building just off UAMS’ main campus in Little Rock, the Milk Bank is a facility that focuses on the health of mothers and newborns in Arkansas through encouragement and support of breastfeeding. The new milk bank will help ensure a ready supply of donor milk for sick and vulnerable infants in neonatal intensive care units (NICU) around the state, shortening the time it takes for regional hospitals to receive critical milk supplies and improving outcomes for babies.

Previously, Arkansas hospitals relied on donor milk purchased from milk banks in Texas, Michigan, Illinois and Oklahoma, costing more than \$1 million a year.

“Sadly, Arkansas has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the U.S., and decreased breastfeeding is a troubling trend that leads to serious health conditions in newborns and their mothers,” said Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA, UAMS chancellor and CEO of UAMS Health. “However, this new facility is a bold statement in support of mothers and their babies, and I am very proud of the leadership and collaboration that was involved in making it a reality.”

The Milk Bank will house screening, pasteurization and nutritional analysis facilities, as well as designated spaces for women to breastfeed or donate their milk. Thanks to mail-in options and drop off locations in some communities, women from all over the state will be able to donate their milk.

The Milk Bank will also serve as a community resource for:

- Breastfeeding classes and counseling for new mothers
- Infant safety including safe sleep programs and car seat checks
- Virtual and in-person support for lactation services and practices

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- Milk donation after loss and bereaved donation support

In 2021, the Arkansas Legislature passed Act 225 establishing the creation of the milk bank and a special fund to help support the bank.

“The health benefits for breastfeeding newborns and their mothers are quite remarkable. Improving breastfeeding rates in Arkansas is critical to lowering the risks of conditions such as sudden unexpected infant death (SUID) and improving Arkansas’ high infant mortality rate,” said Misty L. Virmani, M.D., executive medical director of the UAMS Milk Bank, associate professor of pediatrics and neonatology and director of breastfeeding medicine. “More successfully breastfeeding women will additionally decrease the maternal mortality rate due to lower risk of diabetes, heart attack and stroke. Safe donor milk helps reduce the risk of certain disease in premature babies, some of which lead to death or significant disability.

“In addition to providing safe pasteurized donor milk for those who need it, we are also excited to offer education for health care staff and others about the importance of mother’s milk and how a milk bank and donor milk can help Arkansas’ most vulnerable citizens.”

For information about how to donate milk to the Milk Bank, please visit uamshealth.com/uams-milk-bank. To contact the Milk Bank, please call 501-686-5355 or email milkbank@uams.edu.

UAMS is the state's only health sciences university, with colleges of Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Health Professions and Public Health; a graduate school; a hospital; a main campus in Little Rock; a Northwest Arkansas regional campus in Fayetteville; a statewide network of regional campuses; and seven institutes: the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute, Jackson T. Stephens Spine & Neurosciences Institute, Harvey & Bernice Jones Eye Institute, Psychiatric Research Institute, Donald W. Reynolds Institute on Aging, Translational Research Institute and Institute for Digital Health & Innovation. UAMS includes UAMS Health, a statewide health system that encompasses all of UAMS' clinical enterprise. UAMS is the only adult Level 1 trauma center in the state. UAMS has 3,240 students, 913 medical residents and fellows, and five dental residents. It is the state's largest public employer with more than 11,000 employees, including 1,200 physicians who provide care to patients at UAMS, its regional campuses, Arkansas Children's, the VA Medical Center and Baptist Health. Visit www.uams.edu or www.uamshealth.com. Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).

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