

CORONAVIRUS AND BREASTFEEDING

Can COVID-19 be transmitted through breast milk?

Much is unknown about how COVID-19 is spread. Person-to-person spread is thought to occur mainly via respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks, similar to how influenza (flu) and other respiratory pathogens spread. Recent studies indicate that people who are infected but do not have symptoms likely also play a role in the spread of COVID-19. In limited studies on women with COVID-19 and another coronavirus infection, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV), the virus has not been detected in breast milk; however we do not know whether mothers with COVID-19 can transmit the virus via breast milk.

What is the CDC breastfeeding guidance for other infectious illnesses?

Breast milk provides protection against many illnesses. There are rare exceptions when breastfeeding or feeding expressed breast milk is not recommended. CDC has no specific guidance for breastfeeding during infection with similar viruses like SARS-CoV or Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV). Outside of the immediate postpartum setting, CDC recommends that a mother with flu continue breastfeeding or feeding expressed breast milk to her infant while taking precautions to avoid spreading the virus to her infant.

Can I breastfeed if I have been confirmed of having COVID-19 or am under investigation for COVID-19?

Breast milk is the best source of nutrition for most infants. However, much is unknown about COVID-19. Whether and how to start or continue breastfeeding should be determined by the mother in coordination with her family and healthcare providers. Because people may be able to spread COVID-19 without symptoms and because COVID-19 illness is spreading in communities across the country, a breastfeeding mother should take all possible precautions to avoid spreading the virus to her infant. This includes washing her hands before touching the infant and wearing a cloth face covering over her nose and mouth, if possible, while feeding at the breast. If expressing breast milk with a manual or electric breast pump, the mother should wash her hands before touching any pump or bottle parts and follow recommendations for proper pump cleaning after each use. If the mother is symptomatic, consider having someone who is well feed the expressed breast milk to the infant.

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