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CORONAVIRUS: OPINION OF THE FRENCH NATIONAL ACADEMY OF MEDICINE

Breastfeeding and COVID-19[☆]

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In addition to its nutritional and immune benefits for newborns and infants, breastfeeding maintains and develops the mother–child relationship established during pregnancy [1]. In the event of Covid-19, current scientific data excludes the passage of a viable and contaminating virus in breast milk [2,3].

Two situations can arise:

- the mother, who developed a SARS-CoV-2 infection during the last trimester of pregnancy, is cured at the time of delivery: under these conditions, she must be encouraged to breastfeed because the antibodies pass into breast milk and protect her child;
- the mother is affected by Covid-19 while breastfeeding; three questions then arise:
 - can she continue to breastfeed her child and under what conditions?
 - should the child be separated from its mother if breastfeeding is accepted and continued?
 - if the mother is receiving drug treatment, should breastfeeding be stopped? or should the milk be discarded during the treatment?

In the absence of evidence-based data, expert opinions [4,5] relayed by the “Société française de néonatalogie”

provide answers to the first two questions. The asymptomatic or pauci-symptomatic mother can continue to breastfeed. The child must not be in contact with his/her mother without precautions as long as she remains contagious, but breastfeeding can be continued provided that protective measures are taken with regard to the child: wearing a surgical mask and a gown changed at each feeding, careful washing of the hands, cleaning and disinfection of the nipples, then further disinfection of the hands with hydro-alcoholic gel before picking up the child, and hand washing again after breastfeeding. The only justified drug treatment in a mother with asymptomatic or pauci-symptomatic Covid-19 is paracetamol: for a conventional dosage, the concentrations ingested by the child are approximately 0.1% of the dose ingested by the mother, they are therefore safe and do not require interruption of breastfeeding [6].

In practice, the National Academy of Medicine recommends:

- to always favor breastfeeding to ensure immune protection for the newborn and the infant as well as a quality mother–child relationship;
- to encourage any mother suffering from an asymptomatic or pauci-symptomatic form of Covid-19 to breastfeed, observing all the necessary precautions (careful hand washing and wearing of surgical mask during feeding);
- not to interrupt breast-feeding if the mother is taking paracetamol.

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[☆] Press release from the French National Academy of Medicine, September 8, 2020.

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