

COVID-19 and breastfeeding

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about COVID-19 and breastfeeding

IMPORTANT: This is general information only. Ask your doctor or midwife about what care is right for you.

What is COVID-19 and coronavirus?

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is the disease caused by a new coronavirus named SARS-CoV-2. It can easily be passed from person to person. In most people with good health, COVID-19 is mild. Severe symptoms, such as pneumonia are more common in older people and in those who are already unwell.

As this is a new virus, we are still learning how it may affect you and your baby.

If you have COVID-19, can you breastfeed?

Yes. If you want to breastfeed, this will be supported. There are no reports showing the COVID-19 virus (SARS-CoV-2) is present in breastmilk.

Breastmilk is best for almost all babies. Breastfeeding helps you and your baby bond together. It also helps protect your baby against infection.

Your decision to breastfeed may involve thinking about your baby's health, how sick you are and whether you are well enough to care for your baby. Your healthcare team will discuss your individual situation and feeding options with you.

What is advised about breastfeeding with other infections?

In general, breastfeeding helps protect against many illnesses. For example, when a mother has the flu, breastfeeding is still encouraged with extra care to avoid spreading the virus to her baby.

Can your baby get COVID-19 from breastfeeding?

The COVID-19 virus has not been found in breastmilk. However, COVID-19 is easily passed from person to person through close contact. Additional precautions are recommended while in close contact with your baby, (as they are for other infections).

What precautions should you take when looking after your baby?

If you have COVID-19, it is important to do everything you can to prevent your baby getting the virus, even if you don't have symptoms. This is why it is very important that you:

- wash your hands before and after touching your baby—use soap and water for 20 seconds or alcohol-based hand sanitiser/gel
- routinely clean and disinfect surfaces you have touched
- wear a mask while in close contact including while breastfeeding.
- have a healthy adult assist you to care for your baby where possible

Can your baby be fed expressed breast milk?

Feeding *your* expressed breastmilk (EBM) to *your* baby is strongly supported. If you decide to feed your baby EBM, you will also need to think about:

- your health and your baby's health
- where your baby is located
- who is looking after your baby

Your healthcare team will discuss with you how they can support you and your feeding choices.

What precautions should you take with expressed breast milk?

- wash your hands prior to touching the pump or bottle parts
- clean the pump and all its parts, and the bottle carefully after each use
- if you are unwell, have a healthy care-giver feed the expressed breast milk to your baby where possible
- remind other care-givers to wash their hands using soap and water for 20 seconds or alcohol-based hand sanitiser/gel before after touching your baby

If you are breastfeeding, don't have COVID-19 and haven't been exposed, and are worried. What should you know?

It is understandable to feel worried. Current evidence supports breastfeeding for all the usual benefits it offers to you and your baby.

Follow public health advice about reducing the risk of infection.

Take care with washing your hands regularly, and before and after feeding and touching your baby.

Where possible, use social distancing at home and in hospital.

Support & Information

13HEALTH (13 43 25 84) is a phone line that provides health information, referral and services to the public. www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/advice/13health

Child Health Service Provides newborn drop-in services, early feeding and support, child health clinics. Refer to www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/community-health/child-health-service for your nearest service

Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline 1800 882 436 (free call) offers free, confidential, professional information and counselling for women, their partners and families relating to issues of conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline

Women's Health Queensland Wide 1800 017 676 (free call) offers health promotion, information and education service for women and health professionals throughout Queensland. www.womhealth.org.au

True Relationships and Reproductive Health provides expert reproductive and sexual health care. www.true.org.au/

Australian Breastfeeding Association 1800 686268 (breastfeeding helpline). Community based self-help group offers information, counselling, and support services, on breastfeeding issues www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Lifeline 13 11 14 Lifeline offers a telephone crisis support service to anyone www.lifeline.org.au