

WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK

World breastfeeding week celebrated 1-7 August.

The theme of World breastfeeding week 2020, adapted for South Africa, is:

“Support Breastfeeding for a healthier South Africa”
Breastfeeding questions in the context of emergencies like Covid-19.

Compiled by National Department of Health

Can COVID-19 be passed through breastfeeding?

• Given the current scientific evidence, the COVID-19 virus has not been found in breastmilk. Therefore, it appears unlikely, that COVID-19 would be transmitted through breastfeeding or by giving breastmilk that has been expressed from a mother who is confirmed/suspected to have COVID-19.

• Breastfeeding is recommended for all mothers including mothers suspected/ confirmed to have COVID-19.

What if the mother is confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19?

• Mothers who are suspected to have COVID-19, should still be encouraged and supported to breastfeed.

• If the mother is confirmed to have COVID-19, she should continue to breastfeed. If she is unable to breastfeed, then she should be encouraged to express breastmilk for the baby and to maintain lactation.

What are the hygiene recommendations for a breastfeeding mother confirmed or suspected of having COVID-19 or any other infectious respiratory disease that may be transmitted through coughing or sneezing?

If a mother is confirmed or suspected of having COVID-19 or any other infectious respiratory disease that may be transmitted through coughing or sneezing.

She should:

• Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces.

• Wash hands frequently with soap and running water for 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially before touching the baby. Always wash hands before and after breastfeeding your baby.

• Wear a cloth mask or scarf that covers your mouth and nose while feeding. **It is important to:**

- Not to touch the mask while the baby is breastfeeding or when spending time with your baby.

- Ensure that you do not touch the inner side of the mask.

- After each use, cloth masks should be washed with soap and water and ironed when dry.

- Replace masks as soon as they become damp from breathing.

- Do not touch the front of the mask but untie it from behind.

• Follow good respiratory hygiene: cough or sneeze into your bent elbow covering your mouth and nose, or into a tissue which you must then straight away throw into a closed container and wash your hands again with soap for 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand rub.

• Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces within your home.

Is it necessary for a mother with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 or any other respiratory infections to wash her breast before she breastfeeds or before expressing milk?

• It is not necessary to wash the breast before every breastfeed or prior to expressing milk.

• If a mother is confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19 and has just coughed over her exposed breast or chest, gently wash your chest with soap and luke warm water for at least 20 seconds prior to feeding.

Following delivery, why should a baby still be placed skin-to-skin immediately and breastfed within the first hour after birth?

There are many benefits of skin-to-skin contact (skin-to-skin contact calms the mother and the baby and helps to stabilize the baby's heartbeat and breathing. It keeps the baby warm with heat from the mother's body. It also helps to normalize the baby's blood sugar. It reduces infant crying, thus reducing stress and energy use. It facilitates bonding between the mother and her baby and it supports breastfeeding) and breastfeeding largely overcomes the possible risks of transmission and illness associated with COVID-19.

• Immediate and continued skin-to-skin care, including kangaroo mother care, and keeping the baby warm, is linked with fewer newborn deaths.

• There are many benefits of skin-to-skin contact and



breastfeeding and these largely outweigh the possible risks of transmission and illness associated with COVID-19.

• Placing the newborn close to the mother also enables early initiation of breastfeeding which helps the baby receive colostrum, which is protective against illness, UNLESS if the newborn is too ill for the mother to practice skin-to-skin contact or the mother is too ill to do skin-to-skin practice.

• Mothers who are positive for COVID-19 should only stay with the baby if full infection control and isolation can be guaranteed.

What if the mother is ill?

• Mothers who are critically ill, with COVID-19 and unable to breastfeed directly should be supported to maintain lactation through expressing of milk with the help of healthcare staff.

• For women expressing breastmilk, wash hands before expressing. If using a breast pump, a dedicated breast pump/milk cups should be used. Follow recommendations for breast pump cleaning after each use. Consider asking someone who is well to feed expressed milk to the baby (mother can decant milk from her container into a clean container held by a healthy person to prevent transmission via the containers surface).

If a mother confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19 is not able to breastfeed due to other reasons, what is the best alternative way to feed her infant and are there additional measures needed?

• The best alternatives to breastfeeding for a new-born or young infant are expressed breast milk and donor human milk

• There are always risks associated with giving infant formula milk to newborns and

infants in all situations.

• The risks associated with giving infant formula milk are higher in situations where there is poor or limited access to health services if a baby becomes unwell or poor access to clean water or access to supplies of infant formula are difficult or not guaranteed, not affordable and not sustainable.

• If expressing breastmilk, the extra basic measures that can be followed includes:

- Hand washing for at least 20 seconds before hand expression.

- Wear a mask while expressing.

- Ensuring that milk storage containers and feeding utensils or breast milk pumps need to be appropriately washed after every use with liquid soap, such as dish washing liquid and warm water. Rinse after with hot water for 10-15 seconds. Breast pumps if used should not be shared between mothers.

Is it advisable for a mother with confirmed/suspected COVID-19 or any other respiratory infections who is breastfeeding, to give a 'top-up' with infant formula milk?

• No. If a mother is breastfeeding, there is no need to provide a 'top-up' with an infant formula milk.

• Giving a 'top-up' will reduce the amount of breast milk produced by a mother.

• Mothers who are worried about not having enough breast milk should:

- Make sure that their baby is positioned and attached effectively on the breast and to seek additional practical help from a health worker or a lactation consultant.

- Respond to their infants' hunger and feeding cues and breastfeed their baby as much as the baby wants.