

# Breastfeeding During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The outbreak of COVID-19 is a stressful time for everyone. This may be especially true for mothers who are breastfeeding and concerned about their baby's health. However, mothers can successfully start and maintain breastfeeding during the pandemic, with some recommended precautions.

## Benefits of breastfeeding during a pandemic

- **Breastfeeding is good for babies.** It protects them from many infections. While it is still not clear if breastmilk protects babies from COVID-19, breastfed infants are generally less likely to have severe respiratory symptoms when they get sick.
- **Breastfeeding is good for moms.** Hormones released in the mother's body during breastfeeding promote wellness and can relieve stress and anxiety.
- **Breast milk is readily available.** No purchase necessary! This can be important during public health emergencies, when it may be more challenging to buy formula and other feeding supplies.

## Is breastfeeding and expressed breast milk feeding safe during the COVID-19 pandemic?

SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 disease) spreads during close contact between people when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. So far, infectious SARS-CoV-2 virus has not been found in breastmilk. Breastfeeding has been shown to be safe when a mom has other viral illnesses like influenza.

## Can my baby continue breastfeeding or drinking expressed breast milk if I test positive for COVID-19?

Yes, babies can still receive breast milk even if you test positive for COVID-19. The breast milk is safe and important for the baby.

**Direct breastfeeding.** Wash your hands with soap and water before holding the baby and wear a cloth face covering while nursing. Holding your baby skin-to-skin helps the baby latch on and helps trigger milk release.

**Pumping breast milk.** Put on a cloth face covering, wash your hands well and clean any pump parts, bottles and artificial nipples. Express milk as often as your baby eats, or at least 6 to 8 times per 24 hours. The expressed milk can be fed to your baby by a healthy caregiver. Remind all caregivers to wash their hands before touching bottles, feeding, or caring for your baby. Remember to clean your breast pump after each use, following CDC guidelines.

## If I have COVID-19, can I stay in the same room with my infant?

If you and your family decide to keep your baby in the same room as you, try to keep a reasonable distance away when possible. Wear a cloth face covering and wash your hands whenever you directly care for your baby. Continue taking these precautions until you have been fever-free for 24 hours without taking any fever medicines (acetaminophen or ibuprofen); at least 10 days have passed since your COVID-19 symptoms first started; and all your symptoms have improved. If you tested positive but have no symptoms, wait until at least 10 days after the positive test result.

## How can I maintain my milk supply if I am sick with COVID-19?

Hand pumping and hand expressing breast milk is especially helpful in the first few days after your baby is born to get the milk supply going. Frequent pumping (or breastfeeding if you have chosen to directly breastfeed and are following the strict precautions noted above) should line up with your infant's feeding demands, about 8-10 times in a 24-hour period.

Most medications are safe to take while breastfeeding, but always check with your doctor.

**While this may be a stressful time, try to stay optimistic and practice healthy habits to reduce stress as much as possible. This includes getting enough sleep, eating plenty of healthy foods, and getting regular exercise.**

Ask for help with getting your baby to latch on again once you can restart breastfeeding.

Do not hesitate to ask for help if you have trouble with feeding, nipple pain, low milk supply, or with any other concerns.

## How can I protect my infant from COVID-19 infection?

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer. Look for one that contains at least 60% alcohol. Avoid touching your face, eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands. Also, be sure to clean visibly dirty or possibly contaminated surfaces your infant may touch.

If you feel sick, be extra careful to cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue. Throw away used tissues immediately and wash your hands.

Outside your home, wear a cloth face covering and practice physical distancing by avoiding public spaces and keeping a 6-foot distance from others whenever possible. And be sure that everyone in your home avoids close contact with anyone with respiratory symptoms such as coughing or individuals with probable COVID-19.

## Your pediatrician is here to help

After leaving the hospital, it is important that your baby's first follow-up visit happen within 1-2 days in person so your baby can be examined, measured, and weighed. Many doctors are scheduling newborn visits during specific times (such as first thing in the morning) to limit exposure to sick patients. Your pediatrician also can help if you need more breastfeeding support, a lactation consultant, or help from local groups and resources.

## Remember

Breastfeeding has many important health benefits for babies and mothers, even during the pandemic. Talk with your pediatrician about how to keep your baby healthy and what resources might be available in your community to help you.

## Stay informed

Families are encouraged to stay up to date about this situation as we learn more about how to prevent this virus from spreading in homes and in communities.

For more parenting information from the AAP, visit [www.HealthyChildren.org](http://www.HealthyChildren.org).

For the latest developments from the CDC, including travel warnings, new cases, and prevention advice, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

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