

Infant Feeding and COVID-19 ¹

Key messages:

1. Breastfeeding protects newborns from getting sick and also helps protect them throughout their infancy and childhood.
2. Breastfeeding is particularly effective against infectious diseases because it strengthens the immune system by directly transferring antibodies from the mother.
3. Considering the benefits of breastfeeding and the insignificant role of breastmilk in the transmission of the respiratory viruses, mother with symptoms of or infected with COVID-19 can breastfeed with precautions to prevent infections.
4. All breastfeeding mothers who have symptoms of fever, cough or difficulty breathing, should seek medical care early, and follow instructions of the health care provider.
5. Mothers with symptoms of COVID or infected with COVID can safely breastfeed with following precautions
 - Use a mask when near the child including while feeding
 - Wash hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water before and after contact with the child including feeding.
 - Routinely cleaning/disinfecting any surface they touch by cleaning with soap or sanitizer
6. If mother is too ill to breastfeed, she can express her milk and feed it to the child with a cup or spoon.
7. While expressing breastmilk the mother should wash hands with soap and water, collect milk in a container washed with soap and water.
8. While feeding expressed breast milk the mother should follow all the precautions to prevent infections.
9. If mother is too unwell to breastfeed or express breastmilk, she should explore the possibility wet nursing (another woman breastfeeding or caring for your child) or using donor human milk or restarting breastfeeding after a gap.
10. Mothers should continue breastfeeding should the infant or young child become sick with suspected, probable, or confirmed COVID-19 or any other illness

11. Caregivers should start complementary foods along with breast milk on completion of 6 months. At this age, a baby's rapid growth of body and brain requires more energy and nutrients than what breast milk alone can provide.
11. Delay in introduction of complementary foods affects the child's physical and brain growth and increases the risk of malnutrition.
12. Feed the child a variety of foods such as pulses, milk and milk products, yellow, orange and green vegetables and fruits to support the child's physical growth and brain development.
13. Children have a small stomach, therefore make every bite of food count.
14. Due to lock down, if access to fresh produce is difficult, identify healthy food options to replace fresh produce, limit highly processed foods that are typically high in saturated fat, free sugars and salt, and avoid sugary drinks.
- 16 Wash hands with soap and water before cooking, feeding and eating.
- 17 Also wash child's hands with soap and water before feeding.
- 18 Feed the child from a separate bowl
- 19 Use a properly cleaned bowl and spoon to feed the child.
- 20 Feed children usual amount of foods and fluids more often during illness.

Key messages for Health Staff:

1. In health facilities, infants born to mothers with suspected, probable, or confirmed COVID-19 should be fed according to standard infant feeding guidelines, while applying the necessary hygiene precautions.
2. Breastfeeding counselling, basic psychosocial support, and practical feeding support should be provided to all pregnant women and mothers with infants and young children, whether they or their infants and young children have suspected, probable or confirmed COVID-19
3. Health facility staff should ensure that mother and infant remain together, and practice skin-to-skin contact especially straight after birth to establish breastfeeding, whether or not the mother or child has suspected, probable, or confirmed COVID-19.

Health facility staff should not promote breastmilk substitutes, feeding bottles, teats, pacifiers or dummies in any part of your facilities, or by any of your staff.