

# BREASTFEEDING & COVID-19

*Filmed on 4/29/2020. Always check with local government resources for most up to date information!*

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## **Let's start with the most important and in demand question first: Can I breastfeed/chestfeed my baby if I am positive or have been exposed to Coronavirus?**

- In a word, YES! (2)
- There is no evidence that the virus has been transmitted through breastmilk
  - It is still safe to donate or obtain donated breastmilk through reputable sources such as HMBANA (5)
- According to the World Health Organization (3), a birthing person with COVID-19 "should be supported to breastfeed[/chestfeed] safely, hold [their] newborn skin-to-skin and share a room with [their] baby."
  - If they wish to continue breastfeeding/chestfeeding, they should
    - Wear a mask to protect from transmission via respiratory droplets
    - Wash hands before and after touching the baby, their chest or any human milk products or tools (bottle, pump, etc)
    - Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces
  - If a parent feels too unwell to breastfeed/chestfeed they "can be supported to safely provide [their] breastmilk in other ways", including expressing milk, relactation and donor human milk.

## **But is it really a good idea to even "risk" it?**

- YES!
- There are many benefits to breastfeeding/chestfeeding during many illnesses, including COVID-19/novel Coronavirus
  - (4) "Breastfeeding protects against morbidity and death in the post-neonatal period and throughout infancy and childhood." Even beyond Coronavirus, breastmilk/chestmilk LITERALLY saves lives! Both the lactating parents' and the infants!

- Of course that doesn't mean you shouldn't take the proper precautions as discussed before, but as long as you're able to do those things (mask, wash hands and surfaces), the benefits outweigh the risks in regards to breastfeeding/ chestfeeding and Coronavirus.

**Are there risks if you stop providing breastmilk/chestmilk when positive or have been exposed to Coronavirus? (2)**

- As will apparently be the answer to nearly every question on this side, YES!
- Sudden weaning will increase the lactating parent's risk of breast infections including mastitis
- The infant/child will be at greater risk of becoming ill, as they will not have antibodies passed from their parent
- Once illness is passed it is not always easy or even possible to relocate and/or convince infant to return to direct feeding if there is a long amount of time without directly nursing
- There is often emotional trauma for the infant/child when weaned very suddenly

**So why are many American hospitals separating parents and infants if there is a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 infection?**

- I really wish I knew. Hospitals are often very behind (approximately 17 years) in best practices and unfortunately the Coronavirus Pandemic is no different. (7)
- Alison Stuebe, MD, President of the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine has stated several problems when infants and their parents are separated in those critical hours and days after birth. "For example, infants who lack skin-to-skin contact with their [parents] tend to have higher heart rates and respiratory rates and lower glucose levels. The separation also stresses the [parent], which could make it more difficult for [them] to fight off the viral infection. In addition, separation interferes with the provision of [parental] milk to the infant, which is important for the development of the infant's immune system. Separation also disrupts breastfeeding, which puts the infant at increased risk of severe respiratory infections, including pneumonia and COVID-19." (6)

- I encourage you to find a provider and a birthing place that is the safest and most supportive as possible of your goals and wishes. I would call ahead, can you decline separation from your infant legally? You have the right to decline anything as long as you are not a danger to yourself and others in most states. Generally speaking legal separation between you and your infant must involve other governing bodies and legal processes if you are not comfortable separating from your infant and wish to continue directly breastfeeding.
- The CDC which many mis-quote stating they generally support separating families, states that this should be a COLLABORATIVE decision. Meaning between the parents and medical staff. Not a unilateral forced separation. "Determination of whether to keep a mother with known or suspected COVID-19 and her infant together or separated after birth on a case-by-case basis, using shared decision-making between the mother and the clinical team" (8)

**So in a nutshell, what are the recommendations for optimal and safe feeding?**

- Summarizing information from WHO and LLLI
- Have parents and infants stay together and maximize skin to skin and kangaroo care
- If breast/chestfeeding directly and/or combination feeding with formula and breast/chestmilk
  - Breast/chestfeed as much as possible!
  - "Mothers, including ill mothers, are strongly encouraged, and should be supported, to breastfeed their newborns and babies exclusively through 6 months of life, and then to continue with culturally appropriate complementary foods through 2 years of life and longer, especially during this time when protection from all infections is critical." (9)
    - Ideally wait to wean if you can
    - Increase breast/chestmilk supply if combination feeding with formula to optimize as much breast/chestmilk as possible
- If pumping or indirectly providing breast/chestmilk
  - Keep pumping and providing as much milk as possible for immunity
  - Wash hands before touching your body, your infant, pump or any bottles/cups/parts

- Follow best pump cleaning practices, can be found in resource #10 & safe handling of milk storage and containers in resource # 11
  - The virus can persist on some surfaces such as plastic for a number of hours to days
- Limit the number of people who feed the baby to reduce risk of transmission

# SUPPORTING RESOURCES

Queen At Home Lactation Services & Alyssa Queen RN, IBCLC does not endorse nor sponsor any of these websites or organizations, but these are very informative places to look for information, linked throughout the workbook for your information! We have not written or sponsored any of these pieces of information.

1 - La Leche Infographic for Breastfeeding, Childbirth & COVID-19 in English. Dated 3/27/2020. <https://www.llli.org/breastfeeding-and-coronavirus-infographics/#ENGLISH>

2 - La Leche League USA Coronavirus and Breastfeeding [https://lllusa.org/coronavirus-and-breastfeeding/?fbclid=IwAR0UJ264F4Q-4k2QtQn7m3-JAnPZ3f7I\\_dk35jZiobqqFAdbRroZp3NWSyU](https://lllusa.org/coronavirus-and-breastfeeding/?fbclid=IwAR0UJ264F4Q-4k2QtQn7m3-JAnPZ3f7I_dk35jZiobqqFAdbRroZp3NWSyU)

3 - World Health Organization, all about COVID-19/Coronavirus. Written 3/21/2020. Further down has very short and helpful infographics! <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

4 - WHO clinical management information. [https://www.who.int/publications-detail/clinical-management-of-severe-acute-respiratory-infection-when-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-is-suspected](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/clinical-management-of-severe-acute-respiratory-infection-when-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-is-suspected)

5 - Donation link: <https://www.hmbana.org/news/milk-donation-covid-19.html>  
Donor milk is safe and essential from HMBANA: <https://www.hmbana.org/news/why-donor-human-milk-is-an-essential-need-during-covid-19.html>

6 - Article in Medical News quoting Dr. Alison Stuebe, President of the ABM <https://www.news-medical.net/news/20200412/Risks-and-benefits-of-separating-infants-from-COVID-19-positive-mothers.aspx>

7 - Understanding Time Lags in Translational Research from the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3241518/>

8 - CDC's Considerations for Inpatient Obstetric Healthcare Settings <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/inpatient-obstetric-healthcare-guidance.html>

9 - <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/0890334420919083>

10 - Pump cleaning best practices <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/pdf/hygiene/breast-pump-fact-sheet-p.pdf>

11 - Safe Handling practices <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/0890334420919083>

12 - This Podcast Will Kill You - Coronavirus series <http://thispodcastwillkillyou.com>

13 - KellyMom COVID-19 Summary KellyMom <https://kellymom.com/covid19/covid-19-summary/>

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We at Queen At Home Lactation Services can be reached via [https://  
queenlactation.com/contactus/](https://queenlactation.com/contactus/)

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