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Is it Safe to Breastfeed My Baby if I Have or Have Been Exposed to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)?

Talk to your health care provider about breastfeeding. Decide together what is best for you and your baby.

Breast milk is good for your baby. Your breast milk protects your baby from different illnesses by giving a specific type of protection, called antibodies. Mothers exposed to viruses will make antibodies, which may pass into the breast milk. These antibodies can help to strengthen your baby's ability to fight sickness and stay well.

Will COVID-19 virus get into my milk?

To date, there is no proof that the COVID-19 virus is passed from mother to baby in breast milk. Breastfeeding has been shown to be safe when a mother has the flu. Many child experts recommend breast milk even when a mother has been exposed to or has COVID-19.

Wouldn't it be better to feed my baby formula or donor milk?

Formula or donor milk do not have your one-of-a-kind antibodies that help your baby fight infection. Talk with your health care provider about your concerns and options such as feeding your baby your pumped breast milk. Your decision about breastfeeding is a personal choice about what's best for your baby and you.

I have tested positive for COVID-19 and don't feel sick. What can I do to keep my baby well while breastfeeding?

When feeding or caring for your baby, use a face covering or mask¹. Wash your hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol hand sanitizer before and after feeding. If using a hand sanitizer, it should have at least 60% alcohol. Continue to use a face covering or mask until 14 days after your last positive COVID-19 test. The main risk of breastfeeding is that babies can become sick from germs on a mother's hands or passed by sneezing, coughing, or talking.

What if I begin to feel sick?

If you are sick and choose to feed your baby directly from your breasts, wear a face covering or mask and wash your hands before each feeding.

What if I'm not well enough to breastfeed?

You can pump your breast milk. See instructions below for pumping your milk.

Your milk can be bottle fed to your baby by a healthy person. Other healthy people should wash their hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol hand sanitizer before touching the baby.

If I pump my milk, what else can I do to lower the chances of my baby being exposed to COVID-19?

Germ from coughing, sneezing, talking or from your hands can get into pumped milk.

Take these steps to lower your baby's chances of being exposed to COVID-19 when pumping your milk:

- **Wash your hands with warm, soapy water or a 60% alcohol hand sanitizer before you start to pump or handle the milk collection equipment.**
- **Avoid coughing or sneezing on the breast pump collection kit and the milk storage containers.** After a positive COVID-19 test, wear a face mask for 14 days while pumping breast milk.
- **Cleanse the outside of the breast pump before you use it.** Use a disinfecting wipe, not a baby wipe, on the outside of the pump each time you use it.
- **Keep your breast pump as clean as possible.** Clean pump collection parts with warm, soapy water after each use, and rinse them with clean water. Air-dry pump parts thoroughly on a clean, unused dish towel or paper towel away from dishes or where others might touch them².
- **Sanitize pump parts at least once a day after they have been cleaned.** Kit parts can be sanitized with a microwave steam bag, or by boiling in a pot of water on the stove, or in the dishwasher on the sanitizing cycle.

What if my baby needs donor milk?

Milk banks have taken many steps to make sure the milk they provide is safe. All donor mothers are tested to make sure they are not ill before donation begins. All donor milk is pasteurized – a heat treatment that kills viruses that cause illness.

More information is available here:

¹Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) and breastfeeding:

<https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-special-circumstances/maternal-or-infant-illnesses/covid-19-and-breastfeeding.html>

²Breast pump cleaning recommendations:

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/healthychildcare/infantfeeding/breastpump.html>

Adapted with permission from: Paula P. Meier, PhD, RN and Aloka L. Patel, MD “Is it Safe to Provide Milk for My NICU Baby if I Have or Have Been Exposed to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19?)”

<https://www.larsson-rosenquist.org/en/covid-19-en/#>