



COVID-19 AND BREASTFEEDING

Interim Guidance #2

Dated 12-03-2020

The transmission of COVID-19 has rapidly expanded across locations globally since the previous Interim Guidance on Breastfeeding. WHO has declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic.

This guidance is based on what is currently known about COVID-19 and the transmission of other viral respiratory infections, as informed by the World Health Organization and Centres for Disease Control.

WFP will continue to update the guidance as needed, based on the availability of new information.

Common signs of COVID-19 infection include respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, severe acute respiratory syndrome, kidney failure and even death.

It is possible for people of any age to be infected with the virus. COVID-19 is a new virus and much is unknown about how it is spread. It is thought to be transferred person-to-person in respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, exhales or sneezes; directly breathing in droplets from a person with COVID-19 who coughs out or exhales droplets is the main route of transmission. People may be able to catch COVID-19 by touching objects or surfaces the droplets have landed on, then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

People should seek medical care if they or their child has a fever, cough or difficulty breathing. If feasible, in advance of going it is recommended that the healthcare provider is informed if you have travelled to an area where COVID-19 has been reported, or if you have been in close contact with someone with who has travelled from one of these areas.

Guidance on breastfeeding for women who do not have indications of COVID-19

Considering the vast benefits of breastfeeding, mothers who do not have indications of COVID-19 should continue breastfeeding, while applying all the necessary actions to protect against the infection. This includes regular handwashing and avoiding close contact with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing; stay more than 1 metre (3 feet) away. *(See diagram below: How to handwash)*

Breastmilk is the best source of nutrition for most infants and provides many other important benefits.

To achieve optimal growth, development and health, and save lives, WFP, WHO and UNICEF recommend:

- early initiation of breastfeeding (within an hour from birth);
- exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months of life (unless advised otherwise for medical reasons);
- introduction of nutritionally adequate, safe and appropriate complementary foods starting at 6 months, together with continued breastfeeding until 24 months of age, or beyond, to meet their evolving nutritional requirements.

Guidance for breastfeeding women with confirmed or suspected COVID-19

It is not known whether mothers with COVID-19 can transmit the virus via breast milk.

In limited studies reported to date, on women with COVID-19 and another coronavirus infection, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV), the virus has not been detected in breast milk, However, antibodies against SARS-CoV were detected in at least one sample.

- All mothers in affected and at-risk areas who have symptoms of fever, cough or difficulty breathing, should seek medical care early.
- Whether and how a mother, with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, should start or continue providing breastmilk should be determined by the mother in coordination with her family and healthcare providers in line with the national Ministry of Health guidance. The consultation should consider the latest evidence on COVID-19 transmission and the risks associated with use of a breastmilk substitute within the context.
- All confirmed (and suspected) COVID-19 mothers should take all possible precautions to avoid spreading the virus to her child, including washing her hands before and after touching the infant and wearing a protective face mask, if possible, while feeding at the breast -as well as and regularly cleaning/disinfecting surfaces.
- If the mother is expressing breast milk with a manual or electric breast pump, she should wash her hands before touching any pump or bottle parts and ensure proper pump cleaning after each use. The expressed breastmilk should be fed to the child using a clean cup and/or spoon, preferably by a person who has no signs or symptoms of illness.

Sources of information

Centres for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/pregnancy-guidance-breastfeeding.html>

World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

Further information:

Understanding COVID-19 training course: <https://openwho.org/courses/introduction-to-ncov>

How to Handwash?

WASH HANDS WHEN VISIBLY SOILED! OTHERWISE, USE HANDRUB

 Duration of the entire procedure: 40-60 seconds

