

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Breastfeeding Information for Mothers with COVID-19

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If you have COVID-19 and want to breastfeed your baby, read on for breastfeeding information adapted to your situation.

Reminder

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a respiratory disease caused by the novel coronavirus, also known as SARS-CoV-2.

What are the symptoms?

The main symptoms are fever, a new or worsening cough, difficulty breathing, and sudden loss of smell without nasal congestion, with or without loss of taste. The virus can also cause death in adults, especially among the elderly and those with chronic disease.

How is COVID-19 spread?

The disease is primarily spread from person to person through droplets released into the air when an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes in close proximity with someone else (less than two metres away). Transmission can also occur through direct hand contact with droplets from an infected person. Transmission through indirect contact (e.g., with contaminated objects) is also possible, but is not the main way the disease spreads. A mother with COVID-19 can transmit the virus by being contact with her baby, but the risk is low when proper precautions are taken.

So far, studies have found no indication that the disease can be transmitted through breast milk, including colostrum. What's more, breast milk contains antibodies that help your baby fight infections. When the recommended precautions are taken, breastfeeding has more benefits than risks.

Getting ready to breastfeed

For general information, see [Breastfeeding during the Pandemic – Information for Parents](#).

Breastfeeding at the hospital or birthing centre

After the delivery, if you and your baby are doing well, you can start skin-to-skin contact if you respect the following conditions:

- Wash your hands thoroughly before holding your baby
- Wear a mask at all times during skin-to-skin contact

You should wash your hands before and after breastfeeding and wear a mask while feeding. It is also recommended that you wash your breasts with warm water and mild soap prior to breastfeeding. Special measures will be in place at the hospital after the delivery to protect your baby, such as placing him or her further away in the room between feedings.

Once you are back home, your local CLSC will check in with you by phone to ask how breastfeeding is going and provide support. If necessary, support may be offered to you in person.

Breastfeeding at home

If you are at home when you are diagnosed with COVID-19, a public health worker will contact you to advise you on how to avoid transmitting the virus to the people you live with, including your breastfed baby. Breastfeeding is still possible with COVID-19 as long as you take certain precautions.

If possible, ask a healthy person living with you to care for your baby between feedings. If you wish, you can express your milk and ask the person to bottle-feed your baby during the period when you are at risk of infecting other people.

Take the following precautions each time you breastfeed:

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds prior to breastfeeding
- Clean your breasts with soap and warm water before breastfeeding (be sure to rinse well)
- Wear a mask while breastfeeding

After feeding, remove the mask first and dispose of it in a closed garbage bag, then wash your hands again.

If you are unable to take these steps, it would be wise to express your milk at this time. In addition, if you are unable to breastfeed due to the severity of your symptoms, a healthy person can feed your expressed milk to your baby.

You can contact your local CLSC if you have questions or need advice.

Cleaning your breast pump

If you want to express your milk, wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before you start. After you use the breast pump, all pump components must be:

- Disassembled and rinsed in cold water
- Washed with soap and warm water
- Rinsed in hot or warm water
- Drip dried and covered with a clean cloth

Once you have finished, wash your hands again with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds.

Overcoming challenges

For breastfeeding support resources, see [Breastfeeding during a Pandemic – Information for Parents](#).