



COVID-19 and BREASTFEEDING

Frequently Asked Questions

This handout is intended to provide families with information about breastfeeding their baby/young child during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1. How do I protect myself, my baby, and my family against COVID-19?

Wash your hands well and often. Do not touch your face, eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands. Cover your mouth and nose with a disposable tissue or the crease of your elbow when you sneeze or cough. Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces often. Practice physical distancing and avoid others who are unwell. Check out [BCCDC Prevention](#) for more information on how you can stop the spread of COVID-19.

2. Why is breastfeeding important during this pandemic?

Breastfeeding is important all the time. It's especially important now because breastfeeding provides complete nutrition for your baby and protects against infections. Breast milk has antibodies and immune factors that protect your baby's health throughout their infancy and childhood. Learn more in [Baby's Best Chance: Parents' Handbook of Pregnancy and Baby Care](#).

3. Is it safe to breastfeed or give my expressed milk to my baby if I test positive for COVID-19 (or suspect that I have it)?

Currently health experts have not found COVID-19 in human milk. Breastfeeding will help keep you and your baby healthy during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Like other respiratory illnesses, if you are breastfeeding, you are encouraged to continue.

If you're thinking about weaning, consider delaying if possible. If it's an option, consider increasing your milk supply or re-lactation (restarting breastfeeding after a gap). Learn more [here](#).

4. What extra precautions should I take when breastfeeding if I test positive for COVID-19 (or suspect that I have it)?

COVID-19 is spread by liquid droplets when a person coughs or sneezes. To reduce the risk of passing the virus to your baby, wash your hands before and after breastfeeding and holding your baby. Wear a mask while you are having symptoms (e.g. cough, sore throat, fever, sneezing) and clean and disinfect high touch surfaces often. See this guide to [self-isolation if you are ill](#) and this guide to [self-isolation for caregivers](#).

(continued on back page)

5. Is it safe to hold my baby skin-to-skin or in Kangaroo Care if I have tested positive for COVID-19?

Holding your baby in skin-to-skin and Kangaroo Care, along with breastfeeding, will help your baby to thrive. To protect your baby from contracting COVID-19, wash your hands before and after holding your baby. Wear a mask while you are having symptoms (e.g. cough, sore throat, fever, sneezing) and regularly clean and disinfect all surfaces.

If your baby is in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) and you test positive for COVID-19, you may not be able to enter the NICU until your respiratory symptoms are gone. Discuss with your baby's health care team their guidelines on parent presence.

6. If I am too sick to breastfeed my baby or I'm separated from my baby what can I do?

Express your milk either by hand or use a breast pump. This will protect your milk supply and help establish breastfeeding once you are able to be with your baby. Have a healthy adult feed your baby the expressed breast milk.

Wash your hands before and after expressing your milk and clean and disinfect all surfaces. Wear a mask if you are sick. Avoid coughing or sneezing on milk storage containers and breast pump parts. Clean and disinfect the outside of the pump (areas of high touch – buttons, dials) each time you use it.

Learn more in **Baby's Best Chance: Parents' Handbook of Pregnancy and Baby Care** about: expressing milk; ways to feed expressed milk; cleaning and sterilizing feeding equipment; and how to safely store and transport human milk.

7. Is it safe to feed my baby expressed breast milk from a friend?

Health Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and the Human Milk Banking Association of North America do not recommend sharing human milk with friends, family, or milk-sharing groups. Milk shared informally is not tested or pasteurized to kill harmful bacteria and viruses. Learn more [here](#).

8. How do I find breastfeeding support during times of physical distancing?

It's normal to feel sad, stressed, confused, or scared during a crisis. Help is available. Breastfeed as much as possible and reach out for support from friends, family, peers, and/or health care providers. For additional support call **8-1-1** to speak to a nurse or other health care professional at **HealthLinkBC**. You can also contact your local **Public Health Services, Pacific Post Partum Support Society, Lactation Consultants**, and **La Leche League Leaders**.

For the most trusted and up to date information about COVID-19, visit:
[BC Centre for Disease Control](#).

If you have concerns about COVID-19, discuss with your doctor, pediatrician, obstetrician, or midwife.

