HIV & breastfeeding fact sheet

Breastfeeding when living with HIV is only recommended for some mothers.

Know the facts about breastfeeding and formula feeding when living with HIV.

If you breastfeed...

Your breast milk contains HIV, which can be passed on to your baby.

If you are advised to breastfeed, make sure you take HIV treatment and exclusively breastfeed your baby to reduce the risk of HIV transmission.

If you give baby formula feed...

Baby formula feed is made from powder and boiling water. It contains no HIV because it's man-made.1 2

The baby formula feed must be:

- prepared with clean boiled water
- stored in sterile cups or bottles
- refrigerated and used within 24 hours.3

This can sometimes be very hard to manage but it's important not to mix feed.

Do I need HIV treatment?

Yes.

HIV treatment keeps you healthy and lowers the amount of HIV in your breast milk, reducing the risk of passing HIV to your baby.

For best results start taking HIV treatment as soon as possible.

Guidelines recommend mothers continue to take HIV treatment for life. In some countries mothers will finish taking treatment one week after breastfeeding stops.4

Your healthcare professional can give you advice about taking treatment to protect your baby from HIV.

Does my baby need HIV treatment?

Yes.

Your baby should receive HIV treatment for the first few weeks of life to prevent HIV infection.

Your baby should have an HIV test at 4-6 weeks (or earlier), when you finish breastfeeding and at
If your baby tests HIV-positive they will need to start long-term HIV treatment to stay healthy. It’s really important to go to follow-up appointments to monitor your health and your baby’s health.

**Deciding whether to breastfeed or not**

Your healthcare professional will help you decide whether to breastfeed or give baby formula feed instead.

**Do not breastfeed...**

If baby formula and clean, boiled water are always available, baby formula feed is the safest option. The risk of passing HIV to your baby is 0%!

If these resources are always available to you, make sure you:

- Use baby formula feed only and don't mix with other foods.
- Do not give your baby breast milk.
- Take your HIV treatment exactly as instructed.
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**Do breastfeed...**

Breast milk is best if you cannot always access baby formula and clean, boiled water. Dirty, unsterilised water places your baby at risk of other illnesses.

Your milk contains essential nutrients for protection against childhood illnesses.

But make sure you are taking your treatment correctly.

- Exclusively breastfeed for 6 months (no other foods). Breast milk is very nutritious.
- At 6 months start to feed food and breast milk.
- Wean your baby off breast milk at 12 months, when you can provide them with a nutritional alternative.
- Take your HIV treatment until at least one week after stopping breastfeeding. Some mothers will continue taking treatment for life.
- Give your baby HIV treatment exactly as instructed.

**What to do if...**

**You cannot access HIV treatment and/or safe baby formula feed**

Continue breastfeeding or use heated, expressed breast milk.

**You are unable to continue breastfeeding**

Use heated, expressed breast milk, or baby formula. Do not go back to breastfeeding.

**You want to stop breastfeeding**

Gradually wean over one month.

**Your baby is HIV-positive**

Exclusively breastfeed for the first 6 months and continue for up to 24 months. It is ok to mix-feed your baby.
Know your rights

You have the right to:

- breastfeed your baby
- use baby formula feed
- stop breastfeeding.

1. World Health Organisation (2013, June) 'Consolidated guidelines on the use of antiretroviral drugs for treating and preventing HIV infection: Recommendations for a public health approach'
4. World Health Organisation (2015) 'Guideline on when to start antiretroviral therapy and on pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV'

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