

# Is it Safe to Provide Breastmilk for My Baby if I Have COVID-19 (Coronavirus) or Think I Have Been Exposed to COVID-19?

With so much news about COVID-19, it is natural to worry about whether breastmilk is safe for your baby at this time. This is especially true if you think you have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, or if you have been diagnosed. We want to reassure you that your breastmilk is not only safe, but also beneficial for your baby.

## Can COVID-19 get into my breastmilk?

We do not know for sure if mothers with COVID-19 pass the virus into their breastmilk. The research studies conducted so far did not find COVID-19 in mother's milk. What we do know is studies of mothers who had a similar virus (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome; SARS-CoV) did not find the SARS virus in the mother's milk. It's important to understand that any virus that makes its way into the mother's blood stream causes the mother to make very specific types of protection, called antibodies that fight these same viruses. These antibodies, once made, pass into the mother's breastmilk. So, in the unlikely event that the virus is transferred in the breastmilk, these antibodies can help prevent infection.

## Wouldn't it just be best for my baby to have formula or donor milk?

You might think that not providing your breastmilk would be safer for your baby, but the opposite is true. Only your milk—not formula or donor milk—has the one-of-a-kind antibodies to lower the chances that your baby becomes sick with COVID-19.

We, here at Dartmouth-Hitchcock, strongly agree with the authorities such as the World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Academy of Pediatrics and the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine, who recommend that giving a mother's breastmilk should continue in the presence of COVID-19.

**In the Intensive Care Nursery, mother's milk is even more important because it helps the baby's immature immune system fight all types of infections, including intestinal problems, such as necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC).**

## What else can I do to lower the chances of my baby being exposed to COVID-19 while providing my breastmilk?

Remember that all germs, including COVID-19, can get into pumped milk, even if they do not start in the breast. Here are several precautions you can take:

- **Wash your hands** with warm, soapy water or an alcohol hand sanitizer before you start to pump or handle milk collection equipment.
- **If you have symptoms, wear a mask** while pumping and cleaning your pump parts.
- **Make sure your breast pump collection kit is as clean as possible.** Wash your collection kit with warm, soapy water after each use, then rinse it with clear water, then air-dry away from other dishes or where family members might touch the pieces. Sanitize your kit at least once daily with a microwave steam bag, by boiling in a pot on the stove or in the dishwasher (Sani-cycle).
- **Avoid coughing or sneezing on the breast pump** collection kit and the milk storage containers. This tip is especially important because COVID-19 is spread person to person through droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets also can land on surfaces and may cause infections if someone touches them later.
- **Cleanse the outside of the breast pump** before you use it. Whether in your home or in the ICN, use a germ-killing wipe on the outside of the pump each time you use it.

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