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DATE: March 18, 2020
TO: WIC Breastfeeding Coordinators, Coordinators and All CPAs
FROM: State WIC Office
SUBJECT: COVID-19 and Breastfeeding

You may get questions from women who are concerned about breastfeeding and COVID-19 (coronavirus). Women should discuss recommendations with their health care providers. Consider sharing information on resources with health care providers in your community, if you are able to do so, and with women to share with their health care providers.

COVID-19 and Breastfeeding

[Current CDC Interim Guidance on Breastfeeding for a Mother Confirmed or Under Investigation for COVID-19](#) includes:

- Whether and how to start or continue breastfeeding should be determined by the mother in coordination with her family and healthcare providers.
- Little is known about how COVID-19 is spread, but it is thought the transmission occurs primarily through respiratory droplets.
- In limited studies 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, we do not know whether mothers with COVID-19 can transmit the virus via breast milk.
- Breastmilk provides protection against many illnesses. There are [rare exceptions when breastfeeding or feeding expressed breast milk is not recommended](#). CDC has no specific guidance for breastfeeding during infection with similar viruses like SARS-CoV or Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV).
- A mother with confirmed COVID-19 or who is a symptomatic person under investigation (PUI) should take all possible precautions to avoid spreading the virus to her infant, including
 - Washing her hands before touching the infant and wearing a face mask, if possible, while feeding at the breast.
 - If expressing breast milk with a manual or electric breast pump, the mother should wash her hands before touching any pump or bottle parts and follow recommendations for proper pump cleaning after each use.
 - If possible, consider having someone who is well feed the expressed breast milk to the infant.

The CDC updates their guidance as they learn more. Guidance is found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/pregnancy->

[breastfeeding.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fpregnancy-faq.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/pregnancy-faq.html) (Also linked above.)

Other COVID-19 and breastfeeding resources:

- The National Perinatal Association has a compilation of [COVID-19 information and resources](#), including print materials, videos and infographics.
- The Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine: [ABM Statement on Coronavirus 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#), March 10, 2020.
- [World Health Organization](#), for a population beyond the US. *Home care for patients with suspected novel coronavirus (COVID-19) infection presenting with mild symptoms, and management of their contacts*. Interim guidance. February 4, 2020.

A footnote to their recommendation that household members should stay in a different room... *An exception may be made for breastfeeding mothers. Considering the benefits of breastfeeding and the insignificant role of breast milk in the transmission of other respiratory viruses, a mother could /can continue breastfeeding. The mother should wear a medical mask when she is near her baby and perform hand hygiene before and after having close contact with the baby. She will also need to follow the other hygiene measures described in this document.*

- [A United Nations Population Fund article](#), for a population beyond the US, includes the statement:
Breastfeeding women who become ill should not be separated from their newborns. There is no evidence that the illness can be transmitted through breastmilk. However, breastfeeding mothers who are infected should wear a mask when near their baby, wash their hands before and after feeding, and disinfect contaminated surfaces. If a mother is too ill to breastfeed, she should be encouraged to express milk for the baby, while taking all necessary precautions.
- [Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine](#). *Breastfeeding and Respiratory Antivirals*. March 2020.
 - The article discusses medications used to treat seasonal influenza and, while there is no antiviral proven effective against COVID-19, it summarizes the trials currently in progress and a few case reports of medication use.
- GOLD Learning is offering a free webinar, [Caring for Our Community During COVID-19: How Perinatal/Lactation Workers Can Protect Themselves, Their Clients, and Their Business](#), on March 19, 2020 at 2 pm. (Or view archive.)

We will share additional information as it becomes available.

Breastfeeding education resources:

If families are concerned about formula shortages, you can offer information about finding formula and ask if they are interested in information on increasing milk supply or relactation. Women may not realize that this may be an option. Please encourage participants to work one-on-one with your

agency's Designated Breastfeeding Expert or IBCLC and their health care provider for guidance while increasing milk supply and gradually reducing formula intake. Resources for relactation and breastfeeding during emergency situations include:

- [La Leche League Great Britain Relactation and Induced Lactation](#)
- [KellyMom Relactation](#)
- [La Leche League International Infant Feeding in Emergencies \(multilingual\)](#)

Resources for lactation education on the App and MN WIC website:

The Minnesota WIC App, Nutrition Section includes link to the MN WIC website breastfeeding information and cards.

Minnesota WIC website:

- [Nutrition Information - English \(Breastfeeding Women\)](#)
- [La Nutrición - La Lactancia Materna \(Breastfeeding - Spanish\)](#)
- [Af Soomali - Nuujinta \(Breastfeeding - Somali\)](#)

[Video links](#) Included on this site:

- Hand expression of breastmilk video
- Biological Nurturing Video
- Paced bottle feeding video
- Global Health Media Project Breastfeeding Videos on a variety of topics and in several languages.