

# COVID-19 & Breastfeeding Webinar Series

## Webinar 1: The Impact of COVID-19 on Breastfeeding

### Webinar Goal

- The COVID-19 & Breastfeeding webinar series aimed to enhance and strengthen Healthy Start grantees' capacity to adapt their breastfeeding support in order to meet their client's needs via virtual platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The first webinar in the series described the important role that breastfeeding can play during emergencies, discussed the current guidelines for breastfeeding and milk expression during the pandemic, and shared key strategies and messages to support breastfeeding women and their families.
- The webinar series was hosted by the Healthy Start TA & Support Center in partnership with Cathy Carothers, BLA, IBCLC, FILCA, Co-founder and Co-Director of Every Mother, Inc.



### The Benefits of Breastfeeding During a Pandemic

As a result of systemic and structural injustice, emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impact certain populations, such as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color; those living in poverty; and young children and infants. Because of its role in optimizing health for newborns and mothers, breastfeeding can help mitigate the impact of emergencies on these communities.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), breastfeeding improves survival and provides life-long health and development advantages to infants. Without human milk, infants are essentially immunocompromised. As a result, WHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have encouraged breastfeeding throughout the pandemic. The many benefits of skin-to-skin contact and breastfeeding outweigh the potential risk of transmission and illness associated with COVID-19.

### Breastfeeding After Testing Positive for COVID-19

According to the CDC, current evidence suggests that the risk of a newborn contracting COVID from their mother is low. Given that early and close contact between mothers and newborns has many well-established benefits, mothers who test positive for COVID-19 should still be encouraged to room-in with their newborn after birth.

Breastfeeding mothers who test positive for COVID-19 or think they may have the virus should:

- Wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before feeding the baby or using a breast pump.
  - If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains 60% alcohol
- Wear a mask when feeding the baby (or whenever they are within six feet of the baby)
- Wash all breast pump parts, bottles, and other items that touch the baby or mother with hot soapy water
  - Consider sanitizing as an extra safety precaution.

Mothers who are too sick to care for their baby will need support to express milk and resume breastfeeding when they are able. Fathers, grandparents, or other caregivers can feed expressed milk to the baby. Donor milk is also an option if the mother is too ill to breastfeed or express milk.





## Supporting Families with Breastfeeding

The pandemic has had a profound impact on women's and families' experiences during pregnancy, birth, and postpartum. Healthy Start has an important role to play in encouraging breastfeeding and helping families navigate this challenging time. Below are some key strategies to consider throughout the continuum of care:

### ***During Pregnancy***

- Educate families about the benefits of breastfeeding during a pandemic and the low risk of transmitting COVID to infants while breastfeeding
- Encourage pregnant and breastfeeding women to take precautions to avoid contracting COVID (e.g., vaccination, masking, social distancing)
- Help mothers build their support system, including fathers, partners, grandparents, and other family members and friends

### ***At the Hospital***

- Educate families about the importance of skin-to-skin in the first hour after birth
- Encourage mothers to room-in with their baby during the hospital stay, even if they have COVID
- Help mothers make a plan to engage their support system during their hospital stay, including confirming any hospital policies around visitors

### ***At Home***

- Educate families about infant weight changes in the first 10 days and remind them to contact their health care provider if the baby is not steadily gaining weight
- Encourage mothers to “feed eight or more in 24” (feed the baby eight or more times in 24 hours)
- Remind families of the importance of seeking support for early issues, and that there are solutions!

## References

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2. World Health Organization. 2020. Frequently Asked Questions: Breastfeeding and COVID-19 For Health Care Workers. 1st ed. [ebook] Geneva, Switzerland. Available at: <[https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/maternal-health/faqs-breastfeeding-and-covid-19\\_805d4ce8-2329-4227-9261-695afa68b32c.pdf?sfvrsn=d839e6c0\\_5](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/maternal-health/faqs-breastfeeding-and-covid-19_805d4ce8-2329-4227-9261-695afa68b32c.pdf?sfvrsn=d839e6c0_5)>
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5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022. Breastfeeding and Caring for Newborns if You Have COVID-19. [online] Available at: <<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/if-you-are-sick/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>>