

Coronavirus and Breastfeeding: What Nursing Moms Should Know About COVID-19

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From whether the coronavirus can be transmitted through breast milk to how to clean your pump, here's the latest information for nursing moms.

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It's no secret that we're living in a confusing and stressful time. If you're currently breastfeeding (or pregnant and planning on doing so when baby is born), it's natural to have questions about what the COVID-19 pandemic means for you as a nursing mom.

Keep in mind: Because the novel coronavirus is still fairly new, guidance from experts continues to change. As of now, here's everything health officials know about breastfeeding and COVID-19.

Can COVID-19 be transmitted through breast milk?

"Studies so far have shown that COVID-19 is not found in breast milk," says Leana Wen, M.D., an emergency room physician and public health leader. "However, it could be transmitted through the respiratory route. And so it's just because of how contagious this disease is, there will need to be other precautions taken."

If I test positive for COVID-19, can I still breastfeed my baby?

Yes, but experts recommend taking safety precautions. “Breast milk is still key and very important at this time for babies because it helps them fight infection,” says Daniel S. Ganjian, M.D., a pediatrician at Providence Saint John’s Health Center in Santa Monica, California.

If you test positive for COVID-19, have symptoms (such as a dry cough, shortness of breath, fever, shaking, chills, headache, muscle pain or a new loss of taste or smell) or have been exposed to the virus, it is recommended to continue taking all possible precautions to avoid spreading the virus to your baby. That includes:

- Washing your hands with soap and water before touching your baby.
- Using hand sanitizer with at least 60 percent alcohol if soap and water are not available.
- Wearing a cloth face covering while nursing.
- Practicing good hand hygiene when expressing breast milk.
- Consider letting expressed breast milk be bottle-fed to the baby by a healthy caregiver.
- If you test positive for COVID-19, your baby should be "considered as having suspected COVID-19 for the purposes of infection control" and remain isolated at home for 14 days.
- If you require lactation services that cannot be done virtually, the lactation provider should follow recommended infection prevention and control measures, and wear personal protective equipment (PPE).

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has released guidance recommending that nursing moms who test positive for COVID-19 or who have a suspected case should wash and clean their breasts before expressing milk. In a perfect scenario, that milk would then be fed to your baby by another person who is healthy. If you want to directly nurse your baby, the AAP says it’s important to use a mask and follow “meticulous” breast and hand hygiene.

How should I clean my breast pump?

As for your pump and parts, “regularly cleaning them, and doing it well is important,” says Aline Holmes, D.N.P., N.P., an associate professor at the Rutgers School of Nursing who specializes in emergency preparedness. She specifically recommends [sanitizing your pump](#) parts with either steam or allowing them to boil in hot water for five minutes, before removing the parts with tongs.