

- Breast feeding

How to breastfeed safely in a time of Covid-19

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Is formula safer than breastfeeding during the pandemic?

“No. Here is the hierarchy of food sources for infants: Breast milk from their birth mother, breast milk from a milk donor, followed by formula,” says Dr Mythili Pandi, a family physician and International Board Certified Lactation Consultant, who has three children aged seven to 11.

“We explain to mothers that breastfeeding is not easy to begin with. It is a learnt process, but with practice, they can master it,” says Mrs Josephine Ong, director of nursing at IHH Healthcare Singapore, which includes hospitals such as Gleneagles, Mount Elizabeth, Mount Elizabeth Novena and Parkway East. Spousal support is critical, she adds.

Can Covid-19 pass through breast milk?

“We have no data on whether Covid-19 virus particles can pass through breast milk, but understanding that the antibodies from breast milk do protect the baby may help to assure mothers of its safety,” Dr Mythili says.

However, infected mothers can transmit the virus through “respiratory droplets during breastfeeding or intimate contact”, so if you suspect you have it, follow precautions such as wearing a mask and practising good personal hygiene.

Is it safe to breastfeed after a Covid-19 vaccination?

Yes. “There are studies which have proven that there are antibodies produced by the mother’s breast milk against the Covid-19 virus and it increases with time,” says Dr Mythili.

If I had close contact with a suspected Covid-19 case, should I stop breastfeeding?

Continue nursing your baby as the antibodies produced by your body protect against infection, she says. “But do get tested using the PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test and quarantine yourself along with your baby.”

How do I express milk while working from home?

A good-quality double electric breast pump is ideal, says Dr Mythili. Make sure that the pump’s flanges fit well. If there is too much areola pulled into the funnel, it is too big. If there is friction between the sides of the nipple and the funnel, it is too small.

Mums should remember that the “breast pump is almost never as effective as a baby latching on, so the yields are not an indication of how much milk can be produced”.

They should also learn to express by hand, which helps to unclog milk ducts.

Where can I get breastfeeding support?

The Breastfeeding Mothers’ Support Group runs a counselling hotline and WhatsApp service on 6339-3558. It also has a Facebook group at bit.ly/BMSGgroup.

KK Women’s And Children’s Hospital’s Lactation Service operates from 8am to 4pm on weekdays on 6-CALL KKH (6-2255-554). Or approach your maternity hospital for assistance.

The National University Hospital is organising a webinar on Aug 14 titled Breastfeeding: A Shared Responsibility In Covid-19 Pandemic. Register at bit.ly/breastfeedingwebinar2021