



Covid-19 Disease and Breastfeeding

Breast milk is the optimal milk providing the essential nutrients required for the baby's growth and development needed for infants whose mothers have been confirmed or are suspected Covid-19 positive.¹

Breast milk offers protection against respiratory disease due to the presence of antibodies and other immunological factors passed through the mother's milk.

What is the risk for breastfed infants?

To date, **the coronavirus has not been detected in breastmilk**. As the disease is new, information is being gathered about how the virus spreads to the baby if the mother tests positive at the time of birth or presents as unwell while breastfeeding.

Mother-to-child transmission of coronavirus during pregnancy is unlikely, but after birth, the baby can be infected by person-to-person spread. The main risk of transmission appears to be through the spread of respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs, sneezes or through other means of respiratory spread.²

It is important to note that from the experience obtained so far, Covid-19 disease is generally not severe in infants and young children.

How can the risk be managed if the mother is positive at the time of birth?

If the mother presents to be very unwell, showing symptoms of Covid-19, this prevents her from continuing direct breastfeeding. In this scenario:

- Mother and baby are to be separated.
- Mother is encouraged and supported to express breast milk to provide to her baby while separated.
- The expressed breast milk is placed in a labelled container including the date and the baby's name. Hands should be washed before touching pump or bottle parts and all parts cleaned after each use.

¹ http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/437788/breastfeeding-COVID-19.pdf?ua=1 (accessed 17 April 2020)

² <https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/breastfeeding-special-circumstances/maternal-or-infant-illnesses/covid-19-and-breastfeeding.html> (accessed 17 April 2020)

- The mother is to be swabbed for coronavirus. If the mother turns negative, before discharge, she will be allowed to take the baby home with her.
- The midwifery team at Mater Dei Hospital will provide support to the mother on how to latch the baby properly to the breast prior to hospital discharge.
- Upon discharge the mother is followed up by the community midwife to ensure both the mother and the baby are keeping well.

A breastfeeding mother with Covid-19 in the community

Whenever a mother tests positive for Covid-19, she is to be encouraged to continue breastfeeding her baby. In order to minimise the risk of transmission of virus to the baby, while the mother remains positive, she should remain separate from the baby except during feeding. Another carer should take care of the baby during this time (e.g. washing, nappy changing).

The following precautionary measures must be taken to stop the transmission of the Covid-19 virus to the baby:

- Good respiratory hygiene maintained.
- Practice proper handwashing techniques with soap and water for 20 seconds both before and after holding the baby.
- Use of masks, visors and gloves are to be used to cover the mouth, eyes, nose and the hands respectively.
- Surface areas are to be properly cleaned and disinfected as explained in general guidance documents.