

HIV and Breastfeeding

The safest way for a mother living with HIV to feed her baby is with formula.

If you are taking medicine with an undetectable viral load and choose to breastfeed your baby, we can help make it safer, but it will not be as safe as using formula.

If you use formula, there is no risk of HIV infection.

If you have *detectable* virus in your blood, it is very likely that you also have *detectable* virus in your milk. If the viral load in your blood is *undetectable*, there can STILL be *detectable* virus in your milk.

Your baby can get HIV from breastfeeding if:

- You have detectable virus in your blood or milk
- Your baby is sick and throwing up or has loose poop
- Your baby has severe thrush (a yeast infection in the mouth)
- You have mastitis (cracked or bleeding nipples)

If any of these happen, stop breastfeeding and call your doctor right away.

Rules for breastfeeding:

You must take your HIV medicine every day. This can be hard when you have a new baby. You must keep an undetectable viral load.

You should only give breast milk to your baby for the first 6 months, no other liquids or foods.

Your baby will need to take medicine for the whole time, plus 4 weeks after the last time they breastfeed.

You and your baby will need extra visits and more blood tests.

We encourage you to stop breastfeeding after 6 months. The longer a baby is breastfed, the longer they are exposed to the virus.

Here are some things you can say to people who ask why you are not breastfeeding:

- “Breastfeeding just didn’t work for us.”
- “I am taking antibiotics and don’t want to pass them to the baby.”
- “My baby started with formula, so we just stuck with it.”
- “My baby’s doctor told me they are doing great and we should keep up what we are doing.” “I prefer the privacy.”
- “This means dad can help us more.”
- “I had problems with breastfeeding previously.”

For more resources, go to:

<https://hivinfo.nih.gov/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/group/gender/pregnantwomen/index.html>

http://www.ohtn.on.ca/hiv-transmission-through-breastfeeding/?utm_campaign=website&utm_source=sendgrid.com&utm_medium=email