

COVID-19: Frequently Asked Questions for Midwives: January 2023

This information is subject to change according to Ministry of Health updates.

Infant feeding and COVID-19

There remains no known safety concern for breastfeeding women who receive vaccination. Vaccinated women will provide some protection for their babies against COVID-19 via antibodies in their breastmilk.

Baby Friendly Hospital practices such as mother-baby skin-to-skin care after birth, early initiation of breastfeeding, and mother-baby rooming in together are optimal and recommended.

Breastfeeding

Can breastfeeding be initiated and continued during the COVID-19 outbreak?

Yes. There is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted from a mother to her baby through breastfeeding, or in breast milk. Mother-baby skin-to-skin care after birth, early initiation of breastfeeding within the first hour of birth, and mother-baby rooming-in continue to be recommended practices

Can women with COVID-19 infection breastfeed?

Yes. There is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through breastfeeding. Women who are well enough to breastfeed should plan/continue, and be supported to do so. Midwives supporting breastfeeding when the mother has COVID should follow the COVID-19 guidance on home visiting and use hygienic precautions.

A client with a COVID-19 infection is too unwell to breastfeed

If a mother is too unwell to breastfeed, she can be supported to express breast milk to give to her baby. Hygienic practices should be followed while expressing breast milk. Appropriate infection prevention practices for women with COVID-19 infections should be followed.

1. Wearing a medical face-mask while expressing
2. Following best practices on wearing, removing and disposing of face-masks.
3. Hand hygiene after removal of a face-mask.
4. Hand hygiene before and after expressing (wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds).
5. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
6. Cleaning and disinfecting all equipment used, and any potentially contaminated surfaces.

A client stopped breastfeeding and now wishes to relactate

Successful full relactation depends on various factors including when breastfeeding ceased, the number of breastfeeds prior to stopping feeds, the reason for ceasing breastfeeding, the age of the baby, and the willingness of the baby to return to the breast.

Link to information for midwives - <https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/maximising-breastmilk-and-re-lactation-guidance/>

Links for client information - Australian Breastfeeding Association
<https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/bfinfo/re lactation-and-induced-lactation>

Association of Breastfeeding Mothers UK <https://abm.me.uk/breastfeedinginformation/re lactation/>

Bottle-feeding

Information for parents who are bottle-feeding partially or fully

Advise to take extra care with the preparation of feeds and the cleaning of all bottles, teats, cups and other equipment including breast pumps.

Can women with a COVID-19 infection bottle-feed their babies?

YES. Appropriate infection prevention practices for women with COVID-19 should be taken.

1. Wearing a medical face-mask while feeding.
2. Following best practices on wearing, removing and disposing of face-masks.
3. 3. Hand hygiene after removal of a face-mask.
4. 4. Hand hygiene before and after expressing (wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds).
5. 5. Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.
6. 6. Cleaning and disinfecting all equipment used, and any potentially contaminated surfaces.

Mother-baby skin-to-skin care after birth, and mother-baby rooming-in continue to be recommended practice. In some situations, bottle-feeding and other baby cares, such as nappy changing, can be done by a non-COVID-19 positive person living in the same household. The use of scrupulous hygiene measures when preparing feeds, feeding baby, and cleaning equipment in order to reduce transmission of the virus to the baby is essential.

The use of donor breast milk

I have a client who is using some screened but unpasteurised donor milk for her baby. Is it safe for her to continue to accept milk from donors?

I have a client who is using some screened but unpasteurised donor breast milk for her baby. Is it safe for her to continue to accept milk from donors?

There is no evidence that COVID-19 is transmitted through breastfeeding, or in expressed breast milk expressed by the baby's own mother and given to her own baby. Women infected with COVID-19 are likely to have colonised their breastfeeding babies, which means that breast milk has the potential to transmit protective maternal antibodies to their own infant. This will not be the case when milk from a COVID-19 infected woman is given to a different baby recipient. There does not appear to be any evidence available about the safety of unpasteurised donor milk in terms of COVID-19 infections.

Is pasteurised donor breast milk safe to use?

Women who supply breast milk to a milk bank are screened prior to being approved as donors, and stringent hygienic practices during milk expression are recommended. The donor milk is also pasteurised in a facility where strict hygienic protocols are practiced. Donor milk from a woman who has a known COVID-19 infection would not be accepted by a milk bank. Donors with any COVID symptoms or who are living in close contact with a person who is COVID positive should be encouraged to inform the milk bank staff.

Links for women for further support and information

La Leche League NZ - Support / information for women – on-line and by phone Webpage

<https://lalecheleague.org.nz/> Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/LLNZ/> Twitter @LaLecheLeagueNZ

Breastfeeding NZ – free app and webpage with information <https://www.breastfednz.co.nz/>

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/BreastFedNZ/>

Mama Aroha App for Android

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.kiwamedia.android.qbook.MMAH0001>

Mama Aroha App for Apple

<https://apps.apple.com/nz/app/mother-love/id1579992424>

Find your breastfeeding support – Women’s Health Action Webpage <https://www.womens-health.org.nz/find-your-breastfeeding-support/>

Canterbury – Canterbury Breastfeeding (CanBreastFeed) Webpage <http://canbreastfeed.co.nz/>

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/canterbury.breastfeeding/>

Otago and Southland <https://www.breastfeedingsos.co.nz/>

Capital & Coast District <https://www.ccdhb.org.nz/our-services/maternity/information-sheets/breastfeeding-support-in-yourcommunity-for-the-capital-coast-district.pdf>

Auckland <https://nationalwomenshealth.adhb.govt.nz/our-services/maternity/education-and-support/breastfeeding-support/>