

# HIV and breastfeeding your baby

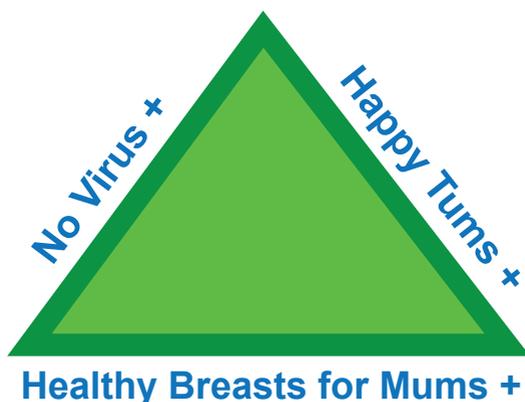
Information on infant feeding

**BSUH Sunflower Clinic**

## Information for mothers

The safest way for a mother living with HIV in the UK to feed her baby is to bottle feed using formula milk. If you are on treatment with an undetectable viral load and choose to breastfeed your baby we can help you make it as safe as possible for your baby, but it will not be as safe as using formula. You will need to protect your baby using 'The Safer Triangle'.

## The Safer Triangle means



### **No Virus + Happy Tums + Healthy Breasts for Mums**

Only breastfeed if your HIV is undetectable AND both you and your baby are free from tummy problems AND your breasts and nipples are healthy with no signs of infection.

### **If HIV virus becomes detectable in your blood:**

Stop breastfeeding and start using formula milk. Do not use breast milk you have expressed and stored. Feed your baby using formula only until you have spoken with your HIV clinic.

### **If your baby has diarrhoea or vomiting:**

Feed your baby with formula milk only. Keep feeding your baby using formula milk even after their tummy is healed.

## **If you have diarrhoea or vomiting, or your breasts have an injury or infection:**

Stop breastfeeding and feed your baby with formula milk OR use breast milk that you expressed more than 2 days (48hrs) before your tummy or breast problem began. If your baby has formula milk while you are ill, continue feeding your baby formula milk only. If your baby did not receive formula milk you may return to breastfeeding two days (48hrs) after your breast problem is healed. If you had tummy problems you must contact your HIV clinic before breastfeeding.

## **Happy tums**

Diarrhoea and vomiting show that a tummy is irritated. If your baby's tummy is irritated it may be more likely that HIV will cross into the blood stream and infect your baby. If your tummy is irritated you may not absorb your HIV medication properly. Only breastfeed if both of you have a 'happy tummy'.

## **No virus**

If the HIV virus in your blood is detectable, there will be HIV in your breast milk, and HIV will enter your baby's body on feeding. You should only breastfeed if your HIV is undetectable.

## **Healthy breasts for mums**

There may be HIV in your breast milk if your nipples are cracked, bleeding, have thrush or develop an infection, or you have mastitis.

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## These four golden rules will help to protect your baby from HIV while breastfeeding.

### 1 Taking your meds = Giving your love

The HIV medicines you take protect your baby as well as you. You need to be 'undetectable', with no HIV detectable in your blood, to breastfeed your baby. The only way to do this is to take your HIV medications at the right time every day.

Every day you are already caring for your baby keeping them clean, warm and comforted. Taking your HIV medication as perfectly as possible is just another part of the love that you are already giving to your child.

### 2 Short and sweet

The fewer breastfeeds your baby ever has, the lower the chance your baby will have of becoming HIV positive. Even if you are taking your HIV medication, your baby has double the chance of becoming infected with HIV if you breastfeed for 12 months rather than stopping before your baby is 6 months old. By 6 months babies are ready to start first (weaning) foods. Good first foods are cooled mashed vegetables like potatoes or carrots, soft fruits or baby cereals mixed with formula milk. Babies' tummies are more irritated during weaning. Using formula milk only while weaning means your baby will get the vitamins and calories he or she needs to grow, while being completely protected from any risk of HIV infection. If your baby doesn't like the bottle at first, try having someone else apart from you give them the bottle – what your baby won't accept from mum, he or she may take from someone else!

### 3 Breast milk only

If you choose to breastfeed you should give breast milk only. This is known as exclusive breastfeeding. Giving breast milk and other foods may irritate the baby's tummy and increase the risk of HIV infection. If you are 'exclusively breastfeeding', it means your baby is receiving no other food or drink. You can still give your baby vitamins or prescribed medicines. Your baby can also have bottles of your own expressed breast milk. We recommend starting to do this early on, so your baby gets used to a bottle as well as the breast.

### 4 Be prepared

Breastfeeding doesn't always go to plan. A mother living with HIV faces the same challenges during breastfeeding as any mother. Living with HIV means these situations need to be managed with extra planning. Advice for a breastfeeding mother who does not have HIV may not be correct for you and your baby. We encourage you to tell your community midwife about your HIV to help make sure they are giving you the right advice for you and your baby. If you are uncertain about something ask your specialist midwife, your specialist children's nurses, or your HIV doctor.

#### Get comfortable

Good feeding positions are better for you and your baby. They will reduce the chance of injuries to your nipple. An injured nipple or inflamed breast (known as mastitis) can increase the amount of HIV in your milk. Ask your specialist midwife and community midwife for help with breastfeeding positions.

## Expressing milk

'Expressing' milk means gently squeezing or pumping your milk from your breast into a sterile container to use either right away or save for later. One of the most useful ways to prepare for any breastfeeding difficulties is to express and freeze your breast milk while your breasts and tummy are healthy and free from problems and your viral load is undetectable. You can express your milk by hand into a cup that has been boiled in water for 10 minutes and then allowed to cool. You can also use a breast pump. You can rent one online or buy one from places such as Boots or Argos. Pumps can be by hand or electric and cost from £10 to more than £200.

Your milk can be safely stored in a sterilised container or individual pre-sterilised plastic breast milk bags (about £7.50 for 30). Write the date and the amount of milk on the container before you store it.

### You can keep your expressed milk:

- In the fridge for up to five days at 4 degrees centigrade or lower. Using a fridge thermometer (about £5 from places like Tesco or Curry's) is the best way to make sure your milk is kept at the right temperature.
- For two weeks in the ice compartment of a fridge.
- For up to six months frozen in a freezer.

Ask your community midwife for more advice on expressing and storing milk.

**BHIVA guidelines on the management of pregnancy for women living with HIV 100**



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