

From the UK WBTi Steering Group



# Breastfeeding during the Covid-19 Pandemic

## How do I manage as a new mother breastfeeding during the Covid-19 pandemic?

### How can I best protect my baby?

Breastfeeding is one of the most important ways you can protect your baby. Your body makes antibodies in your milk which help your baby fight infections. Breastfeeding also helps babies develop a good immune system.

No evidence has been found that coronavirus is passed through breastmilk. Mothers make specific antibodies to infections they have and these pass into their milk. This means that a mother with Covid-19 is highly likely to help protect her baby by breastfeeding.

#### Covid-19 precautions

However, any baby could be exposed to Covid-19 if their carer coughs or sneezes over them so the parent/carer might prefer to wear a face covering when in close contact and needs to wash hands regularly. RCOG (the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists) provides more details under *Advice for women with suspected or confirmed coronavirus infection who have recently given birth*.<sup>1</sup>

#### Fewer visits to GP or hospital

Exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months, then continuing to breastfeed alongside other foods, helps babies be as healthy as possible and lowers their chance of needing to see a GP or have a hospital stay, e.g. for ear or chest infections.

#### Food security

Breastfeeding means parents do not have to worry about formula supplies or even shop for formula.

### How do I know my baby is getting enough?

Babies are normally weighed at birth, 5 days & 10-14 days (when the health visitor usually takes over from the midwife). With the pandemic, there may be few opportunities to have your baby weighed or see your midwife or health visitor face-to-face.

However, your baby's behaviour and nappy contents can help you know if your baby is getting enough milk.

From 6 days to around 6 weeks, milk intake is probably fine if:

- your baby is usually contented after feeds
- has at least 6 heavy wet nappies/ day
- has 2 poos each at least the size of a £2 coin per day

After 6 weeks, some babies poo less often but the overall amount is about the same.

For normal patterns in the first week and photos see this NCT information.<sup>2</sup>

***In the first week, if your baby hasn't pooped for 24 hours, contact your midwife and a breastfeeding helpline or local supporter.***

### How do I know breastfeeding is going well?

It's going well if your baby is getting enough and you are finding breastfeeding comfortable.

Start4 life provides very useful information about how breastfeeding helps the health of babies and mothers and how to help your baby latch on well.<sup>3</sup>

However, if your baby often falls asleep during feeds and wakes up again hungry after a few minutes,

feeds are regularly longer than an hour, or it is uncomfortable or painful for you, the most likely reason is that your baby isn't latched well enough to feed effectively.

## How can I increase my milk supply?

If your baby is producing less wee and poo than expected, or you are topping up with formula,

- can you breastfeed more often – another feed or two in 24 hours?
- are you offering both breasts at every feed? you could switch back and forth during a feed
- breast compression can increase milk flow
- can you contact a helpline or breastfeeding supporter for more suggestions?

Remember - if you feel your baby is feeding very often, they are trying to get enough milk, and also helping to increase your milk supply.

## And if breastfeeding isn't going well?

To latch well the baby needs to gape wide, have the nipple in the upper part of their mouth, and chin pressed against the breast. Snuggle your baby close, head free, nose level with your nipple. This detailed information from La Leche League shows different positions you could try, and ways of helping your baby latch better.<sup>4</sup>

If feeding is painful or you are breastfeeding very frequently but your baby isn't getting enough milk or, *get skilled help!* You could also express your milk and offer your baby expressed milk until your baby starts feeding better and your nipples have healed. The Breastfeeding Network has information about expressing and storing breastmilk.<sup>5</sup> Your midwife or health visitor can help you learn to use a cup or bottle safely.

## Where can I get skilled help?

You can contact the local midwifery team or health visiting service using the phone numbers you've been given. Often there is an Infant Feeding Coordinator or team who can provide more specialised support. They may also put you in contact with a volunteer breastfeeding counsellor or peer supporter. There are several charities continuing to offer free skilled breastfeeding support (see below). Your GP is the appropriate contact for medical situations - such as mastitis that isn't improving after 24-48 hours – alongside breastfeeding support.

## Partners and family support

Her partner can be a huge support to a mother who is breastfeeding and one possible silver lining of the pandemic is that many are at home and able to give more support.<sup>6</sup>

## UK breastfeeding helplines

National Breastfeeding Helpline 9.30am – 9.30 pm	0300 100 0212
La Leche League GB (LLLGB)	0345 120 2918
La Leche League Northern Ireland	028 95 818118
NCT Helpline 8am – 12 midnight	0300 330 0700
Breastfeeding Helpline for Bengali/Sylheti speakers	0300 456 2421
Breastfeeding Helpline for Tamil/Telugu/Hindi speakers	0300 330 5469
Breastfeeding Network (BfN): Drugs in Breastmilk Information <a href="https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/detailed-information/drugs-in-breastmilk/">https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/detailed-information/drugs-in-breastmilk/</a> <a href="mailto:drug-information@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk">drug-information@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk</a>	

## Virtual Support by Video

LLLGB has daily free local online support groups<sup>7</sup>

NCT - details of free local Zoom groups available via the helpline: 0300 330 0700

IBCLCs (International Board-Certified Lactation Consultants) – these may work for the NHS, voluntarily or provide a paid-for service. To find an IBCLC see the LCGB website.<sup>8</sup>

## Reliable sources of information

World Health Organisation,<sup>9</sup> LLL,<sup>10</sup> BfN,<sup>11</sup> NCT,<sup>12</sup> ABM<sup>13</sup>. The Baby Buddy app from Best Beginnings provides more personalised information.<sup>14</sup>

## Our message to you

We hope you enjoy breastfeeding and continue for as long as you and your baby want to.

### References

- [1. https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/#recently](https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/guidelines-research-services/guidelines/coronavirus-pregnancy/covid-19-virus-infection-and-pregnancy/#recently)
  - [2. https://www.nct.org.uk/baby-toddler/nappies-and-poo/newborn-baby-poo-nappies-what-expect](https://www.nct.org.uk/baby-toddler/nappies-and-poo/newborn-baby-poo-nappies-what-expect)
  - [3. https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/how-to-breastfeed/latching-on/](https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding/how-to-breastfeed/latching-on/)
  - [4. https://www.laleche.org.uk/positioning-attachment/](https://www.laleche.org.uk/positioning-attachment/)
  - [5. https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/breastfeeding-help/expressing-storing/](https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/breastfeeding-help/expressing-storing/)
  - [6. https://www.nct.org.uk/baby-toddler/feeding/tips-for-dads-and-partners/how-can-dads-and-partners-support-breastfeeding](https://www.nct.org.uk/baby-toddler/feeding/tips-for-dads-and-partners/how-can-dads-and-partners-support-breastfeeding)
  - [7. https://www.laleche.org.uk/find-ill-support-group/](https://www.laleche.org.uk/find-ill-support-group/)
  - [8. https://www.lcgb.org/find-an-ibclc/](https://www.lcgb.org/find-an-ibclc/)
  - [9. https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-covid-19-pregnancy-childbirth-and-breastfeeding](https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-covid-19-pregnancy-childbirth-and-breastfeeding)
  - [10. https://www.laleche.org.uk/breastfeeding-support-in-the-uk-during-the-covid-19-situation/](https://www.laleche.org.uk/breastfeeding-support-in-the-uk-during-the-covid-19-situation/)
  - [11. https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/coronavirus/](https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/coronavirus/)
  - [12. https://www.nct.org.uk/baby-toddler/feeding/common-concerns/it-safe-breastfeed-coronavirus2](https://www.nct.org.uk/baby-toddler/feeding/common-concerns/it-safe-breastfeed-coronavirus2)
  - [13. https://abm.me.uk/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19-Free-resources-8.pdf](https://abm.me.uk/wp-content/uploads/COVID-19-Free-resources-8.pdf)
  - [14. https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/baby-buddy/](https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/baby-buddy/)
- Authors: Patricia Wise, Helen Gray, Clare Meynell, Alison Spiro