



H1N1 and Breastfeeding: Fact Sheet

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The World Health Organization and the Public Health Agency of Canada recommend breastfeeding as an important way to safeguard infant health during the H1N1 flu pandemic. There are many ways that breastfeeding and breastmilk can protect your baby's health. Infants who are not breastfed get sick from infections like the flu more often and more severely than infants who are breastfed. Breastmilk contains protective antibodies and other special substances that will help your baby fight off infections. Pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers should receive the H1N1 vaccine.

What general hygiene measures can I take to protect my baby and myself from getting H1N1?

H1N1 flu virus is passed from person-to-person through coughs and sneezes. Always practice good hygiene including frequent hand washing with soap and hot water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Use clean tissues to cover your nose or mouth when coughing or sneezing and discard the tissue immediately after using it. Ask family and friends to delay their visit if they have a cough, fever or other flu symptoms. Keep your baby close to you and limit close contact by non-caregivers. Avoid taking your infant out into crowds. Avoid using pacifiers and artificial teats as they are hard to keep properly cleaned and can spread flu viruses. Use clean blankets and burp cloths.

Can I continue to breastfeed if I have the H1N1 flu virus?

Yes. Breastfeeding should continue even if you have the H1N1 influenza virus. Wash your hands well before breastfeeding and holding your baby. You should wear a face mask when breastfeeding or in very close proximity to your baby if you have flu symptoms. Use a clean cloth blanket to cover your clothes while breastfeeding. It is thought that the H1N1 virus is not passed on to a baby through breastmilk. The exact risk is not known, but reports of seasonal flu being passed on through breastmilk are rare.

Can I continue to breastfeed if I am receiving anti-viral treatment?

Yes. Breastfeeding should continue if you are taking Tamiflu (oseltamivir) and Relenza (zanamivir) as both medications are considered safe while breastfeeding. Low dosages of the anti-viral medication are passed to the baby through breastmilk. Over the counter drugs such as acetaminophen for fever and ibuprofen for muscle pains are generally used by breastfeeding mothers and are safe in most situations.

What if I am too sick to breastfeed?

If you are too sick to breastfeed your baby, your breastmilk can be expressed and provided by a caregiver using a cup, spoon, syringe, eye dropper or bottle. Keep up your milk supply by regular expression if you are not directly feeding your baby. Ask for help from your health care provider.

Can I breastfeed if my baby has H1N1?

Yes. Keep breastfeeding if your baby becomes ill with H1N1. Sick babies need to breastfeed more often to increase their fluid intake. Continued breastfeeding may also help reduce the severity of your baby's respiratory symptoms. Have your baby seen by a physician if the baby is sick and having trouble breathing or breastfeeding.