

Flu (Influenza)

Questions & answers about feeding your infant



Natural Defenses

Each mother's milk is custom-made to fight the kinds of germs that are around her and her baby. The germ fighters, called "antibodies," change each day as mother and baby are exposed to new germs (bacteria, virus, etc.).

Each year, there are different groups of flu viruses that can make people sick. Young babies are at higher risk for severe illness from flu, especially the new influenza A (H1N1) infection also called "Swine Flu". New vaccines are made each year to protect against the flu virus groups around that year.

What are the signs of flu?

Fever over 100°F along with body aches, chills, fatigue, cough, sore throat, and sometimes nausea and vomiting.

Can we tell one kind of flu from another?

Not from the signs you see. Some flu viruses make people sicker or spread easier than others. For example, the swine flu spread very easily. Scientists who study diseases can tell the different kinds apart. All flu illnesses are treated the same.

What can I do to protect my baby from flu?

- Get the flu vaccine! Pregnant women and people who take care of babies who are less than 6 months old should be vaccinated every year.
 - **Breastfeed! Mother's milk helps protect babies from many kinds of illness. It helps build the baby's immune system until they are old enough to fight off germs on their own. Babies who are less**
- **than 6 months old are too young to be given the flu vaccine, so breastfeeding is the best way to protect them.**
 - Don't be around sick people. Ask family and friends not to visit if they might be sick. Keep your baby at least 6 feet away from someone who is sick until their fever has been gone at least 24 hours and they can control or cover coughs and sneezes.
 - Wash your hands with plain soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub before caring for or feeding your baby. Wash your hands after you touch your eyes, nose, or mouth, and before you touch the baby.
 - Try not to cough or sneeze in the baby's face while feeding your baby, or any other time you and your baby are close. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you do not have a tissue, turn your head away into your elbow or shoulder. Then don't put your baby against that area. Change your clothes or put a cloth between that area where you sneezed or coughed and your baby.
 - As much as you can, have only people who are not sick care for your baby.
 - If you are sick and there is no one else to care for your baby, wear a face mask while you



- are close to your baby (within 6 feet).
- Wash your baby's hands with mild soap and water.
- Make sure all the things you give your baby or that are near your baby are properly cleaned so they do not spread germs.

More information and tips on good health habits for preventing sickness from the flu virus can be found at this website: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm>.

Should I stop breastfeeding my baby if I think I have come in contact with the flu?

No. Mothers make antibodies to fight diseases they come in contact with so their milk is custom-made to fight the diseases their babies are exposed to as well. This means that by breastfeeding you will pass on protection against flu directly to your baby. Continuing to breastfeed is extra important in young babies as their immune system is still developing. It is OK to take medicines to prevent the flu while you are breastfeeding. You should make sure you wash your hands often and do all that you can to prevent the spread of this virus (<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/habits.htm>).

What if I get sick with flu while I am breastfeeding?

Do what you can to get well fast. Get extra rest and drink lots of liquids.

- Continue to breastfeed if you are able. This is the best possible protection against flu for the baby.
- If you feel too sick to breastfeed, pump and someone who is not sick can give your baby your expressed milk. Babies less than 6 months of age should be fed only breast milk if possible.
- Ask for help from someone who is not sick to assist in the care of your baby.
- If there is no one else who can take care of your baby while you are sick, try to wear a face mask at all times when you are feeding or caring for your baby or within a few feet

of your baby.

- Be extra careful about washing your hands often to prevent your baby from getting flu. Using a cloth blanket between you and your baby during feedings might also help.
- It is OK to take medicines to treat the flu while you are breastfeeding.
- If you are too sick to breastfeed, contact a lactation consultant (<http://zipmilk.org> or "Find a Lactation Consultant" at <http://www.ilca.org>).

Is it OK to take medicine to treat or prevent flu while breastfeeding?

Yes. Call your doctor if you have been exposed to someone with signs of flu or you think you are getting the flu. Your doctor may prescribe an anti-flu medicine. These medicines can help protect you from getting flu if you have been exposed to it. The same medicine can help you get well faster. They work best when you begin them right away. They are safe to take while you are breastfeeding.

If my baby is sick, is it OK to breastfeed?

Yes. One of the best things you can do for your sick baby is keep breastfeeding.

Do not stop breastfeeding if your baby is sick. Give your baby many extra chances to breastfeed while they are sick. Babies who are sick need more fluids than when they are well. The fluid your baby gets from your breast milk is better for him than anything else; much better than water, juice, or Pedialyte® because it also boosts your baby's immune system.

If your baby is not eating as well as normal, you may need to express (pump) milk to keep making lots of milk. Having a good milk supply makes it easier for a baby to eat better, get well, and keep growing. If your baby is too sick to breastfeed, he or she can be given your milk from a cup, bottle, syringe, or dropper.

Resources

- American Academy of Pediatrics on Infant Feeding in Disasters – <http://www.aap.org/breastfeeding/files/pdf/InfantNutritionDisaster.pdf>.
- International Lactation Consultant Association, November 2010, "Tips for Parents: Protecting your Baby Against Flu."
- Statement from the Department of Health in the United Kingdom – http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/Children/Maternity/Maternalandinfantnutrition/DH_099965.

Please look for new information about seasonal flu and the H1N1 virus by visiting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website (<http://www.cdc.gov>).