

# Breastmilk and COVID-19

## Quick Reference Guide

**Note:** The advice in this document may change frequently, even daily as new evidence becomes available. Please be aware and stay up to date with other channels of communication from Western Health via the [live site](#) and/or email which may supersede the advice in this document.

### Transmission of COVID-19 to Neonates

There is limited information on the transmission of the virus through breastmilk. Based on this, Western Health continues to support skin-to-skin contact at birth, and breastfeeding of neonates born to women with suspected or confirmed COVID-19, while applying necessary precautions for infection prevention.

The main risk of breastfeeding for neonates is the close contact with the woman. For this reason, the strategies outlined below should be implemented to limit viral spread to the neonate.

### In Hospital

#### ***Suspected or Confirmed Mother Rooming-in with Neonate in Single Room***

Women should be provided with a face mask to wear following birth, and commence skin-to-skin if woman and neonate are both well.

- Neonate is kept in a cot about 1.5 metres away when the woman is not breastfeeding
- The woman should wash hands before touching the neonate, breast pump or bottle
- The woman should wear a face-mask for feeding at the breast
- If expressing milk:
  - A dedicated breast pump must be used
  - Follow recommendations for pump cleaning after each use
  - Consider asking someone who is well to feed expressed milk to the neonate

#### ***Suspected or Confirmed Mother in Maternity Ward and Neonate in Newborn Services (NBS)***

Women who intend to breastfeed / continue breastfeeding should be encouraged to express their breast milk to establish and maintain milk supply.

When expressing milk:

- A dedicated breast pump should be provided
- Woman should wash hands before touching the neonate, breast pump or bottle
- Collect expressed breast milk (EBM) in a bottle.
- Label bottle, then wipe with a disinfectant wipe (integrity of label may be compromised)
- Placed into a zip lock specimen bag, and label outside of bag
- Wipe bag over with a disinfectant wipe

EBM is to be delivered to NBS by a staff member wearing appropriate PPE (gloves, face mask, eye protection) where the zip lock bag is removed and discarded, and the bottle is to be wiped over with a disinfectant wipe.

After each pumping session, the entire pump should be wiped down with a disinfectant wipe.

## At Home

### **Suspected or Confirmed Woman and Neonate at Home Together**

Women identified as suspected COVID-19 should continue to take all possible precautions to avoid spreading the virus to their neonates. Persons with confirmed COVID-19 infection should remain separate (home isolation precautions) from other family members and friends including the neonate, except for breastfeeding. This should continue until home isolation precautions have ended.

The woman should take the same precautions listed above for breastfeeding and expressing in hospital. Where possible, another uninfected adult should provide most of the care for the neonate, including feeding the EBM (if applicable).

### **Suspected or Confirmed Woman at Home in Isolation and Neonate in NBS**

Women should be encouraged and supported to express breast milk when necessary. The woman should take the same precautions listed above for expressing in hospital.

EBM should be labelled as per the advice when in hospital, and the EBM should be transported by a well support person to NBS reception, to be provided to the allocated NBS nurse/midwife.

On arrival the bag should be discarded, bottle wiped over, and the EBM decanted into a clean, labelled bottle prior to storage or feeding to the neonate.

Rooming-in	Baby in NBS	Woman and baby at home together	Woman at home, baby in NBS
Wash hands and wear mask	Wash hands and wear mask	Wash hands and wear mask	Wash hands and wear mask
Breastfeed neonate or express breast milk and give to neonate	Express breast milk into clean container	Breastfeed neonate or well caregiver give to EBM to neonate	Express breast milk into clean container
Place neonate in cot 1.5m away post breastfeed	Label container and wipe over with disinfectant wipe	Place neonate in cot 1.5m away post breastfeed	Label container and wipe over with disinfectant wipe
Wash hands	Place into zip lock bag, label bag and wipe over with disinfectant wipe	Wash hands	Place into zip lock bag, label bag and wipe over with disinfectant wipe
	Staff member wearing PPE takes bag to NBS	Follow precautions until completion of isolation (or confirmation of covid-19 negative result)	Well support person to take EBM to NBS
	Bag removed, bottle wiped with disinfectant wipe		NBS staff member dressed in PPE to retrieve bag
	Decant EBM into a clean labelled bottle		Bag removed, bottle wiped with disinfectant wipe
	Breast milk given to neonate or stored for future use		Decant EBM into a clean labelled bottle
			Breast milk given to neonate or stored for future use.

**The breastfeeding support service team are available 7 days per week on 9055 3219 and 9055 3131 if you have any questions about the information in this bulletin or about the breastfeeding care and advice you are giving.**