

## Infant Feeding During the COVID-19 Pandemic

### COVID-19

For general information on COVID-19, including how to guard against stigma, visit [nyc.gov/health/coronavirus](https://nyc.gov/health/coronavirus). For real-time updates, text “COVID” to 692-692. Message and data rates may apply.

### COVID-19 and People Who Are Pregnant

Based on what we know at this time, pregnant people are not more likely to be infected by the virus that causes COVID-19, but they might be at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 compared to non-pregnant people. There may also be an increased risk of negative pregnancy outcomes, such as preterm birth, among pregnant people with COVID-19. Finally, there have been a small number of reports of babies who may have been infected before birth, although the extent is unknown and is still a rare event.

It is always important for pregnant people to follow public health guidance on how to protect themselves from illnesses, including COVID-19.

Please see [COVID-19: Recommendations for People Who Are Pregnant, Breastfeeding or Caring for Newborns](#) for answers to the following questions:

- What can pregnant people do to prevent COVID-19?
- Can people with COVID-19 “room in” with their baby?
- Will I have to change my prenatal care appointments?
- Should I change my delivery plan or location of delivery?
- Information for people who have recently given birth (the “fourth trimester”)

### Who Is Most at Risk for Serious Illness if They Have COVID-19?

People of all ages can be infected by the COVID-19. People at increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 are adults 50 years or older (people 65 years and older are at the highest risk), and people who have chronic health conditions, such as:

- Cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Immunocompromised state (weakened immune system) from solid organ transplant
- Obesity (body mass index of 30 or higher)
- Serious heart conditions, such as heart failure, coronary artery disease or cardiomyopathies
- Sickle cell disease
- Type 2 diabetes mellitus

This is not a comprehensive list and there may be other possible risk factors. For additional information, visit [nyc.gov/health](https://www.nyc.gov/health) and search for “[COVID-19 groups at higher risk](#)”. If you are an older adult or have any of the chronic health conditions listed above, it is especially important for you to carefully monitor your health and practice physical distancing and healthy hand hygiene.

### **Food Security During Emergencies**

[Breastfeeding is a critical part of disaster response](#). Infants and children are most at risk during emergencies when infant formula and feeding supplies are limited, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, some families may find themselves in unsanitary environments or without access to clean water. All of these factors can increase risk of diarrhea or other diseases. It is important that parents who can provide breast milk to their baby are supported and protected in doing so.

### **Why is Breast Milk Important?**

Breast milk provides perfect nutrition tailored specifically to your baby. It contains nearly all the protein, sugar, fat, vitamins and minerals that babies need to grow healthy and strong. It is easily digestible and adapts to the nutritional needs of your baby, feed by feed.

It also lays the foundation for a newborn’s immune system by providing immune factors, enzymes and white blood cells. Infants also receive your antibodies, helping protect them from infections, including diarrhea and respiratory infections common among infants in emergency situations.

### **How Can I Make Enough Milk for My Baby?**

Feeding soon after birth and feeding often during the first few weeks of life (on-demand feeding) will help your body know to make enough milk to feed your baby. Skin-to-skin contact and rooming-in are two practices you can do in the hospital that will help with this and are good for the baby even if you are not feeding them breast milk.

Skin-to-skin contact: Immediately after birth, place your naked baby on your chest (skin-to-skin) and keep them there until they feed, or at least 60 to 90 minutes.

Rooming-in: Having your baby stay with you in your room (rooming-in), even if 6 feet apart, will help you both learn about each other and give you plenty of opportunities to feed them when they show they are hungry (feeding cues).

If you and your baby must be separated due to illness or you are unable to provide milk to your baby, it is still important to express your milk regularly to establish and maintain your milk supply. Remember, you have to move milk to make milk. If you do not express your milk, your body will stop making so much. The hospital staff can help you — let them know you want to feed your baby your milk and ask them to help you learn about and perform these practices. See

the section “[Helpful Skills and Information to Promote a Healthy Milk Supply](#)” below for more information.

### **Can People With COVID-19 Breastfeed?**

Yes, people with COVID-19 or symptoms of COVID-19 can breastfeed, while taking precautions to avoid spreading the virus to their infant.

It is important to wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds immediately before breastfeeding and to use a mask or face covering. A face covering is any well-secured paper or cloth that covers your mouth and nose. Another option is to pump and express milk. If you use a pump, all parts of the pump should be washed thoroughly between uses. Consider having someone who is not sick and not symptomatic feed the baby your milk in a bottle.

While evidence is limited at this time, it appears unlikely that COVID-19 can be passed on to a baby while nursing. Because of the many benefits of nursing, including providing the birthing parents’ antibodies, which protect the baby against infection overall, it is recommended that parents who want to feed their baby human milk do so while following the precautions described above.

### **Helpful Skills and Information to Promote a Healthy Milk Supply**

- Starting Early and Starting Well
  - [Breastfeeding in the First Hour: It’s in Your Hands](#)
  - [The Breast Crawl and First Feed](#)
  - [Attaching Your Baby at the Breast](#)
  - [Creating Deeper Latching](#)
  - [Ensuring a Good Milk Supply](#)
- Understanding [Normal Newborn Behavior](#), [Feeding Cues](#) and [Feeding on Demand](#)
- Expressing Milk
  - [Hand Expression \(Stanford\)](#) and [Hand Expression \(Global Health Media\)](#)
  - [Using an Electric Pump and Hands-on Pumping](#)
  - [Power Pumping](#)
  - [Pump Hygiene](#)
- Safe Storage and Feeding of Expressed Milk
  - [Safe Milk Handling](#)
  - [Alternative Feeding Methods](#)
  - Baby-Led / Paced Bottle Feeding
    - [Paced Bottle Feeding](#)
    - [Bottle Feeding](#)
    - [Baby Led Bottle Feeding](#)
- [Practices to Promote Attachment and Bonding](#)
- [Promoting Milk Supply and Avoiding Formula Supplementation](#)
- [Chestfeeding / Lactation Support for LGBTQIA+](#)

- Transition to Direct Breast/Chestfeeding after [Supplementing](#) / [Pumping](#)

### **What Alternative Feeding Methods Are Available if I Choose Not to Breastfeed or Am Unable to Produce Enough Milk for My Baby?**

The preferred next alternative is donor human milk. Contact [The New York Milk Bank](#) for further support.

If donor human milk is not available, infant formula is the next preferred alternative. While infant formula is an important resource for families who cannot or choose not to breastfeed, emergencies can cause shortages of formula as well as challenges getting formula during shelter-at-home.

Formula feeding may also increase financial burden on families who are experiencing job loss or other changes to income. It requires clean water, power or fuel, and electricity to properly prepare, sanitize, and store formula (see [Safe Formula Preparation](#) and [Baby-Led/Paced Bottle Feeding](#) resources, above). Families may not be able to provide formula in a safe and clean environment or afford enough formula to feed their infants and may begin “stretching” or diluting formula, which is **not** advised. If you need formula and are unable to find or afford it, contact your local [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children \(WIC\) office](#) for further support.

### **Family Nutrition**

It is important that you and your family stay healthy and fed, particularly the breastfeeding parent. If you or your family are struggling with food security due to access or cost issues, visit [nyc.gov/getfood](http://nyc.gov/getfood) for COVID-19 food assistance resources.

### **Post-discharge Support Options**

- Call 311 and ask for “[newborn care](#).”
- Postpartum Doula Support
  - [Ancient Song Doula Services](#)
  - [By My Side Birth Support Program](#) (under “Doula Services”, for clients who enroll prenatally)
  - [Brooklyn Perinatal Network](#)
  - [Caribbean Women’s Health Association](#) (Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan)
  - [Community Health Center of Richmond](#) (Staten Island)
  - [Carriage House Birth](#)
  - [The Doula Project](#)
  - [Baby Caravan](#)
  - [NYC Doula Collective](#)
  - [Bird Song Brooklyn](#)
  - [Boober](#)
- Mt. Sinai [Caring for Your Newborn](#) Video (available in English and Spanish)

- Lactation Support
  - [La Leche League](#)
  - [Chocolate Milk Cafe](#)
  - NYC Health Department Virtual Baby Cafés
    - Morissania: [eventbrite.com/e/63303442300](https://eventbrite.com/e/63303442300)
    - Harlem: [eventbrite.com/e/63302824452](https://eventbrite.com/e/63302824452)
    - Brownsville: [eventbrite.com/e/63301605807](https://eventbrite.com/e/63301605807)
  - [New York Lactation Consultant Association](#)
  - [National Women's Health and Breastfeeding Helpline](#)

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves.

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