



# **HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital Reminds Mothers About The Benefits Of Breastfeeding**

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O'FALLON – With August being National Breastfeeding Month, HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital is reminding new and expectant mothers about the importance of breastfeeding, even in this time of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The World Health Organization (WHO) says that breastfeeding is supposed to work almost like a newborn's first vaccine, providing vital antibodies and an immunity boost through the mother's milk. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, 75% of mothers breastfeed their newborns, but the number of infants who are still breastfed exclusively drops to 13% by the time they are six months old. Studies show that babies who are not breastfed exclusively for the first six months are more likely to develop allergies, childhood obesity, colds, flu, ear infections, and more.



## **Breastfeeding and COVID-19**

Mothers understandably may have concerns about breastfeeding at this time of COVID-19. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), while we can't be certain at this time whether mothers with COVID-19 can transmit the virus via breast milk, the limited data available suggest this is not likely. The CDC recommends that whether and how to start or continue breastfeeding should be determined by the mother in coordination with her family and health care providers.

If you are breastfeeding and have symptoms of or confirmed COVID-19, the CDC recommends taking the following steps to avoid spreading the virus to your baby:

- Wash your hands before touching your baby.
- Wear a cloth face covering, if possible, while feeding at the breast or pumping.
- Wash your hands before touching the pump or bottle parts and clean all parts after each use.

The WHO agrees with the CDC that following infection prevention and control measures is essential to prevent contact transmission between COVID-19 suspected or confirmed mothers and their newborns and young infants. In a recent [scientific brief](#), the

WHO recommends that mothers with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be encouraged to initiate or continue to breastfeed. Their study outlines that the risk of COVID-19 infection is low in infants, the infection is typically mild or asymptomatic, while the consequences of not breastfeeding and separation between mother and child can be significant. Per their study, at this point, it appears that COVID-19 in infants and children represents a much lower threat to survival and health than other infections that breastfeeding is protective against. The WHO also recommends that a mother with confirmed COVID-19 should be counseled to take precautions to avoid spreading the virus to her infant, including handwashing and wearing a cloth face covering.

“Breastfeeding, whether by the breast or pumping breast milk, is so important to an infant as it provides protection against many illnesses, while also supporting bonding between the mother and baby,” said Julie Brooks, RN, BSN, CLC, childbirth educator /lactation counselor. “For mothers who want to breastfeed but are concerned about COVID, we encourage them to follow the CDC guidelines to wash their hands and wear a mask while their baby is feeding at the breast but want them to know it is very safe to breastfeed their baby.”

## **Breastfeeding Benefits**

The normal and natural food for a newborn baby is breast milk. Their need for breast milk continues as they grow. The following are a few benefits of breastfeeding:

- **Breast milk is liquid gold.** Colostrum, known as liquid gold, is the thick yellow breast milk that mothers make during pregnancy and just after birth. This milk is very rich in nutrients and antibodies to protect your baby. Although your baby only gets a small amount of colostrum at each feeding, it matches the amount his or her stomach can hold.
- **Breast milk changes as your baby grows.** Colostrum changes into what is called mature milk. By the third to fifth day after birth, this mature breast milk has just the right amount of fat, sugar, water, and protein to help your baby continue to grow. It is a thinner type of milk than colostrum, but it provides all the nutrients and antibodies your baby needs.
- **Breast milk is easier to digest.** For most babies, especially premature babies, breast milk is easier to digest than formula. The proteins in formula are made from cow's milk and it takes time for babies' stomachs to adjust to digesting them.
- **Breast milk fights disease.** The cells, hormones, and antibodies in breast milk protect babies from illness. In fact, among formula-fed babies, ear infections and diarrhea are more common. Formula-fed babies also have higher risks of lower respiratory infections, asthma obesity, and type 2 diabetes.

- **Breastfeeding is beneficial to mothers as well.** Mothers who breastfeed tend to lose their post-pregnancy weight faster, recover from childbirth faster and are at a lower risk for developing breast and ovarian cancer.

## **Breastfeeding Support**

- For mothers needing additional support to be successful in their breastfeeding journey, HSHS St. Elizabeth's Women and Infants Center offers breastfeeding classes and nurses are available 24/7 to assist you with lactation or other questions. Breastfeeding class dates for the rest of 2020\* are September 3, October 1, November 12, and December 10. Ongoing safety precautions are in place at the hospital for the safety of all. Patient temperatures will be taken, and each person will be asked additional COVID-19 related screening questions. All participants will also be required to wear a mask in the building and are asked to social distance.

For more information, visit [steliz.org/Medical-Services/Women-Infants-Center](https://steliz.org/Medical-Services/Women-Infants-Center) or call 618-234-2120, ext. 31260.

For more information about breastfeeding, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/>.