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During  **COVID-19**
For Gynaecologists

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SURAKSHA MODULE – 2

BREAST FEEDING IN COVID-19 SUSPECTS AND POSITIVE CASES

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Introduction

- With the rapidly spreading pandemic of COVID-19 infection, pregnant women with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 and their new born infants form a special vulnerable group needing special care and attention. Perinatal period poses unique challenges for mother and baby. Breast feeding is one such aspect that requires taking a decision, the risks and benefits of breastfeeding, including the risk of holding the newborn in close proximity to the mother should be properly discussed.(1)
- Breast milk is the only nutrition support for majority of neonates and infants. Breast milk is essential as it not only is the source of nutrition but also acts as a natural immunity booster for neonates and infants(2). As of now very limited studies have been conducted to know whether mothers with COVID-19 can transmit the virus via breast milk, but the chances are least likely for a mother to child transmission of COVID-19 via breast milk(3).

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Introduction

- There is a lot of concern regarding Breast feeding if a woman turns out to be positive for COVID-19. So, it is recommended that all confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases and mothers with any symptoms who are breastfeeding or practicing skin-to-skin contact should take all due precautions.
- Whether and how to start or continue breastfeeding should be determined by the mother in coordination with her family and healthcare providers. A mother with confirmed COVID-19 should be counselled to take all possible precautions to avoid spreading the virus to her infant, including hand hygiene and wearing a cloth face covering

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Actions for breastfeeding mothers who are suspects or confirmed cases of COVID-19

- A mother with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be counselled to take all possible precautions to avoid the transmission of the virus to the new born(3).
- A newborn who is being breastfed by a mother with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should also be considered as having suspected COVID-19 (2).
- For the purpose of infection control and prevention, the newborn should be kept under the mother's recommended period of home isolation and 14 days following it (2).

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Actions for breastfeeding mothers who are suspects or confirmed cases of COVID-19

- She should practice respiratory hygiene, including during feeding. If there are respiratory symptoms such as being short of breath, use a medical mask is recommended when near to the child(Image1)
- Thorough handwash/proper hand hygiene is highly recommended with soap or sanitizer before and after contact with infant.
- Routine cleaning and disinfection of any surfaces is recommended wherever that patient comes in contact with.



Women with COVID-19 can **breastfeed** if they wish to do so. They should:



Practice respiratory hygiene and wear a mask



Wash hands before and after touching the baby



Routinely clean and disinfect surfaces



World Health Organization

#COVID19 #CORONAVIRUS

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Breastfeeding when the mother with COVID-19 and the newborn is temporarily separated:

- If patient is severely ill with COVID-19 or suffers from other complications that prevents her from caring for infant or continuing direct breastfeeding, advice expressed milk to safely provide breastmilk to your infant(3).
- The mother should be provided with a dedicated breast pump.
- She should follow proper hand hygiene before touching the pump or bottle parts and even before expressing breast milk. She should also practice respiratory hygiene by wearing a face mask.
- The mother should be trained to clean and sanitize the breast pumps after each use.
- It is important that all the parts that come in contact with the breast milk are cleaned

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Breastfeeding when the mother with COVID-19 and the newborn is temporarily separated

- A healthy caregiver who is not at a high-risk of illnesses from COVID-19 should be allowed to feed the expressed breast milk to the newborn.
- The healthcare provider should follow the recommended infection prevention and control measures, including the use of appropriate personal protective equipment while feeding the newborn.
- If the mother with COVID-19 or its complication is too unwell to breastfeed the newborn, she can be supported to safely provide breast milk to the newborn in a way possible to her.

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The storage guidelines for breast milk if patient have COVID-19:

- The Academy of breast feeding medicine and International Lactation Consultant association(4)state that although it is still unknown whether mothers with COVID-19 can transmit the virus via breast milk, limited studies on breastfeeding women with COVID-19 and other coronavirus infections have not detected the virus in breast milk.
- From that perspective, one can follow the regular breast milk storage guidelines.

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The storage guidelines for breast milk if patient have COVID-19:

| Storage place | Room temperature 16 °C to 25 °C (60 °F to 77 °F) | Refrigerator 4 °C (39 °F) or colder | Freezer -18 °C (0 °F) or colder | Previously frozen breast milk thawed in the refrigerator |
|-------------------|---|---|---|--|
| Safe storage time | Up to four hours is best Up to six hours for milk expressed under very clean conditions* | Up to three days is best Up to five days for milk expressed under very clean conditions* | Up to six months is best Up to nine months for milk expressed under very clean conditions* | Up to two hours at room temperature Up to 24 hours in the refrigerator Do not refreeze |

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The storage guidelines for breast milk if patient have COVID-19:

- If mother has expressed breast milk cleanly and safely, she can store it at room temperature, in the fridge, or in the freezer, depending on how soon she want to use it.
- Mother should follow all the guidelines regarding cleaning and sanitising her breast pump These guidelines for storing and defrosting breast milk are a recommendation. They can contact their lactation consultant or breastfeeding specialist for further information.
- If mother is refrigerating or freezing expressed milk, she should always label the bottles or bags with the amount and the date it was pumped, so she can track and manage her stored milk.

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What is the recommendation for use of breast pump if a mother is hospitalised due to Coronavirus disease?

- According to the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine, mothers who intend to breastfeed / continue breastfeeding should be encouraged to express their breast milk to initiate and build / maintain milk supply. If possible, a dedicated breast pump should be provided by the hospital.
- Prior to expressing breast milk, before touching any pump or bottle parts, mothers should wash their hands appropriately and take the necessary precautions such as wearing a face mask for at least 5-7 days until cough and respiratory secretions are dramatically improved.

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What is the recommendation for use of breast pump if a mother is hospitalised due to Coronavirus disease?

- After each pumping session, all parts that come into contact with breast milk should be thoroughly washed following hospital recommendations for proper pump kit cleaning and the exterior of the entire pump should be properly disinfected using 70% ethanol or another alcohol-based disinfectant that is active against SARS-CoV-2.

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How long is Coronavirus stable on surfaces such as pumps/kits/accessories?

- According to a new study from National Institutes of Health, CDC, UCLA and Princeton University scientists in [The New England Journal of Medicine](#)(5) the authors found that severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was detectable as follows

| | | | | |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| In aerosols | On copper | On Cardboard | On Plastic | On Stainless Steel |
| Up to 3 hours | Up to 4 hours | Up to 24 hours | Up to 48 to 72 hours | Up to 48 to 72 hours |

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How should one clean her pumping equipment if positive for COVID-19?

- When using a breast pump to express breast milk, she should wash hands before touching any pump or bottle parts and follow the [CDC](#) recommendations for proper pump kit cleaning after each use.
- Recommendations encourage that someone who is not sick feed the expressed breast milk to the infant.

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