

Breastfeeding and the Flu



Can a breastfeeding mother receive a flu shot?

Yes, either a flu shot or nasal spray flu vaccine should be given to breastfeeding mothers. There is no risk of harm to a baby if a mother receives a flu vaccination, only a health benefit!

- Preventing the flu in mothers can reduce the chance that the infant will be exposed to the flu and get it.
- Breastfeeding mothers can pass on antibodies made in response to the flu shot through their breast milk. This can reduce the baby's chances of getting sick with the flu.
- Babies less than 6 months of age have no other way of receiving vaccine antibodies, since they are too young to be vaccinated.

Does breastfeeding protect babies from flu viruses?

Yes, mothers pass on protective *antibodies* to their babies during breastfeeding for a variety of infectious diseases, including the flu. Antibodies are a type of protein made by the immune system when a person is exposed to or vaccinated against a disease. Antibodies are a vital defense against infections. Flu can be very serious in young babies and breastfeeding is one way a mother can offer protection from illness. Babies who are not breastfed get sick from infections like the flu more often and more severely than babies who are breastfed.

When will my baby be old enough to get the flu vaccine?

- Flu vaccine may be given to children six months of age and older.
- Children aged six months through eight years of age receive 2 doses of flu vaccine at least one month apart the first year they receive the vaccine. Only one dose per year is needed after that.
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If my baby is sick with the flu, is it okay to breastfeed?

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

- Give your baby many chances to breastfeed throughout the illness.
- Babies who are sick need more fluids than when they are well.
- The fluid babies get from breast milk is better than anything else - even better than water, juice, or Pedialyte® because it also helps protect your baby's immune system.

If your baby is too sick to breastfeed, you will need to pump your milk so your baby can drink your milk from a cup, bottle, syringe, or eye-dropper. Talk with your doctor or health care provider if your baby is not drinking breast milk.

Should I stop breastfeeding my baby if I think I have been exposed to the flu?

No, don't stop, keep breastfeeding.

- Because mothers make antibodies to fight diseases they come in contact with, their milk is custom-made to fight the diseases their babies are exposed to, including flu. This is very important for young babies who haven't been exposed to the flu before.
- You should make sure you wash your hands often with soap and water.

Should I breastfeed if I am sick with the flu?

Yes, keep breastfeeding and talk with your doctor. Flu viruses do not pass through breast milk.

- Be careful not to cough or sneeze in baby's face.
- Wash hands before touching baby.
- Before breastfeeding, wash breasts with mild soap and water.
- Wear a mask when nursing to prevent sharing the virus with baby and others.
- Use clean blankets or burp cloths for each feeding.
- Make sure that others who help to feed your baby follow above guidelines.

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

Yes, it is okay for mothers who are breastfeeding to take medicine (antiviral drugs) to prevent or treat the flu. Talk with your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions about flu medicines.

For more information, contact your health care provider or call the Oklahoma Breastfeeding Hotline at 1-877-271-MILK (6455) to talk with a Registered Lactation Consultant 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Adapted from materials from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 10/8/2012