

# Cold, Flu and Breastfeeding or Chestfeeding

Breastfeeding, chestfeeding or providing expressed milk is safe and important, even when you have cold or the flu-like symptoms.

Your milk helps protect your baby from illness and gives comfort and nutrition while you recover.

This handout explains how to safely keep feeding and when to get help.

## How do I protect my baby when I am ill?

Wash your hands often with soap and water or use hand sanitizer. Try not to touch your face with unwashed hands. If you cough or sneeze, use a tissue. Clean and disinfect high-touch surfaces often.

## What if friends or family are unwell?

Ask friends or family with cold or flu-like symptoms to delay visiting until they are well. If a visit cannot be avoided, visitors should wash their hands, wear a mask, and avoid holding or kissing the baby. Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces after they leave.

## Why is feeding my baby human milk helpful when I am sick?

You may choose to give your milk by pumping or hand expressing if you are quite unwell. Your milk has antibodies and special protection that helps your baby fight germs. Human milk is easy

to digest, keeps your baby hydrated, and gives comfort when they are unwell. These benefits are important for all babies, especially for babies who are born early or have health needs.

## Is it safe to provide human milk if I test positive for influenza, Covid-19 or have flu-like symptoms?

Yes.

Continue breastfeeding or chestfeeding, or offer expressed human milk. Wash your hands before touching your baby or your pump. Try not to cough or sneeze near your baby. These steps help stop the spread of germs while your baby continues to get the immune protection found in your milk.

It is safe to keep breastfeeding or chestfeeding, or to give your baby expressed milk.

## What extra steps should I take while feeding?

- Wash hands before every feed and after blowing your nose.
- Consider wearing a mask if you have respiratory symptoms such as coughing and sneezing.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces you touch often, like doorknobs, phone, and pump parts.
- If someone else helps bring your baby to you, ask them to wash their hands first, before handling your baby.

*more information on other side →*

<p><b>Call 8-1-1</b> Healthlink BC www.healthlinkbc.ca</p>	Nurse	24 hours a day	Daily	<p>Call 8-1-1 to speak with a nurse, ask a dietitian about nutrition, or a pharmacist about your medication.</p>
	Dietitian	9 a.m. – 5 p.m.	Mon – Fri	
	Pharmacist	5 p.m. – 9 a.m.	Daily	
	Hearing Impaired	Call 7-1-1		

# Cold, Flu and Breastfeeding or Chestfeeding *(continued)*

## Can I hold my baby skin-to-skin?

Yes.

Skin-to-skin helps babies grow, stay warm, and calm. Wash your hands before and after, and wear a mask if you are coughing. If your baby is in the NICU, follow the unit's guidance on parent presence when you have symptoms.

Skin-to-skin contact, often called "kangaroo care," means holding your baby directly on your bare chest. Skin-to-skin helps your baby resist infections. Good bacteria from your skin protects your baby. This contact helps healthy bacteria grow on your baby's skin and help build your baby's immune system.

## What should I do if I am too unwell to feed my baby directly?

Express milk by hand or with pump to protect your supply (8 to 12 times per day, 5-10 minutes per side or until breast/chest feels empty). Ask a healthy adult to feed your expressed milk to your baby. Wash hands before and after pumping, and clean pump parts well after each use. When you feel better, bring your baby back to your body.

## What if my baby is preterm or in the NICU?

Human milk is very important for babies who are premature or medically fragile. It helps protect them from infections and supports healing and growth.

Your NICU nurses and care team can help you give human milk in a safe way, either through direct feeding or other methods based on your health and your baby's needs.

If you are unwell, your NICU health care team may ask that you refrain from coming into the NICU temporarily to protect the babies. If you have symptoms, your health care team may ask you to wear a mask while feeding or caring for your baby.

Ask your NICU team for help with:

- Pumping and storing milk
- Providing milk when not at the bedside
- Building or maintaining your milk supply

- You can also use parent-friendly NICU lactation resources (see QR code).

## Can my baby get milk from a friend?

Health Canada, the Canadian Paediatric Society, and human milk experts do not recommend getting milk from friends, family, or online groups. This milk is not tested or pasteurized, so it may not be safe. See QR code Informal Milk Sharing.

If your own milk is not available, talk to your care team about:

- Pasteurized donor human milk from an approved milk bank
- Infant formula, if donor milk is not available

## Are medicines safe to take while feeding my baby human milk?

Many medicines are safe, including:

- Acetaminophen
- Ibuprofen

Some cold medicines or decongestants may reduce your milk supply. Always ask your doctor, pharmacist, or lactation consultant before starting a new medicine.

## Where can I get help?

### Healthy From The Start lactation line:

1-855-868-7710 (Mon–Fri, 8:30–4:00)

**HealthLink BC:** Call 8-1-1 for advice in many languages

**Public Health Nurse** in your community



## Additional resources



Breastfeeding & Feeding Your Baby | Interior Health



Canadian Premature Babies Foundation



Informal Milk Sharing Family Info