



the**well**project

An Overview of Infant Feeding Options for Parents Living with HIV

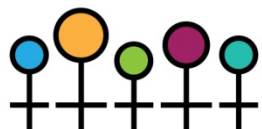
Last updated: October 21, 2022

Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

#onewomanatatime

www.thewellproject.org

#thewellproject

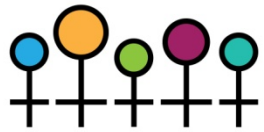


thewellproject

Breastfeeding, Chestfeeding, and HIV

Breastfeeding while taking HIV drugs:

- Standard of care for women and other parents living with HIV in resource-limited areas globally
- Shown to increase survival and well-being of their babies
- Likelihood of HIV transmission extremely low
 - *Breastfeeding* is also called nursing, body feeding, chestfeeding (term inclusive of those who do not have breasts due to surgery or otherwise, or who may prefer language that is gender neutral)

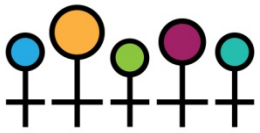


thewellproject

Breastfeeding, Chestfeeding, and HIV

In high-resource settings like the US, Canada, and western Europe, HIV and public health guidelines discourage breastfeeding among women living with HIV

- Address neither the potential health benefits of breastfeeding, nor the potential health risks to parent and child of not breastfeeding
- Available information can be confusing for those who may want to explore breast/chestfeeding



the**well**project

Breastfeeding, Chestfeeding, and HIV

- Parents may consider breast/chestfeeding for important emotional, cultural, family, and health reasons – even in areas where formula is easily accessible
- In recent years, HIV treatment guidelines for resource-rich countries have included updates acknowledging the desire of some women living with HIV to breastfeed; suggesting ways for providers to support parents considering this option

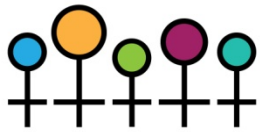


thewellproject

Informed Infant Feeding Decision-Making

- Many reasons why parents may choose a method other than breast/chestfeeding
- Having information about a range of options can prepare you for conversations with your provider, and support you in making an informed decision

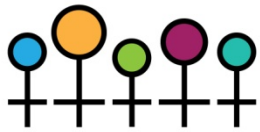




thewellproject

Breastfeeding as Safely as Possible

- Take your HIV drugs exactly as prescribed (adherence)
 - Keeps amount of virus in your blood low; makes it far less likely that your baby will acquire HIV
 - Provider may run additional viral load tests while you are breastfeeding
- Make sure your infant gets their HIV drug doses
 - If you breastfeed, additional drugs and testing may be prescribed for baby
- Do your best to breastfeed exclusively (no other forms of nutrition for the baby) for 6 months
- Take good care of your breasts
 - Try to avoid engorgement, mastitis, cracked nipples



thewellproject

Breastfeeding as Safely as Possible

- Find people who will help you manage stressors
 - Taking care of an infant, healing your own body after birth, breastfeeding, dealing with your HIV
- Seek help if you feel very sad after having a baby ("postpartum blues" or, in more severe cases, postpartum depression)
- Ask knowledgeable people in your community or professionals (lactation consultants, etc) for advice on any breastfeeding challenges
 - Cracked or sore nipples, baby having difficulty nursing
- Take good care of your own health while nursing
 - Enough healthy food, clean water to drink, rest



thewellproject

Other Options for Infant Feeding

Infant Formula

- Safest option from HIV perspective; guarantees absolutely no risk of HIV transmission
- Modified cow's (or goat or soy) milk to be similar to human milk
- Has no antibodies or protective effects of breast milk
- Available as a powder (mix with clean water) or liquid (must be refrigerated after opening)
- Usually not free



thewellproject

Other Options for Infant Feeding

Milk Bank

- Women who produce more breast milk than they need may donate extra
 - Potential donors are screened and take blood tests before donating their milk
 - Milk bank gives that milk (often for a cost) to babies who for whatever reason cannot be breastfed
- Milk banks may not always have enough to give away
- Your baby may get milk from different women with different antibodies; may not get as much of some antibodies as when always fed by one woman

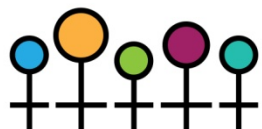


thewellproject

Other Options for Infant Feeding

Wet Nurse or Cross-Feeding

- Arranging for another woman to breastfeed your baby (paid or informal via a friend)
- Wet nurses were once common
- Depends on a woman producing more breast milk than she needs
- Woman providing milk must be nearby where your baby is, available whenever baby must be fed
- Woman would need to be screened for HIV, other health conditions that affect breastfeeding



thewellproject

Other Options for Infant Feeding

Flash Heating

- Express your own breast milk, then quickly heat to destroy germs or viruses
- Process also destroys some other components of milk that are healthy for baby
- Developed for people in resource-limited countries who do not have access to any other options listed
- Extremely time-consuming process



thewellproject

What Choice Should I Make?

You are the only person who should decide how your baby will be fed

- If you choose to breastfeed, it is important to:
 - Keep up with health care exactly as prescribed and recommended by your provider
 - Find a support network and a provider whom you trust, who can be good sources of information without judgment
- Making this decision can be challenging
- You may feel fear, stress, or even some sadness over any choice you are considering

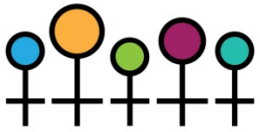


thewellproject

What Choice Should I Make?

Take care of yourself during this process

- Connect with a group of women or others who can offer support, write about your thoughts and concerns, or engage in some other activity that helps you feel supported as you prepare to make the best possible decision for you and your growing family



the**well**project

Learn More!

- To learn more, and for links to articles featuring more details, please read the full fact sheet:
 - [Title and link tktktktk](#)
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
 - www.thewellproject.org
 - www.facebook.com/thewellproject
 - www.twitter.com/thewellproject