

# HIV and Infant Feeding

\*This infographic uses the terms 'breastfeeding' & 'mother' as they are most commonly used, but recognizes that people of all genders feed their babies and may prefer other terms such as 'body feeding' or 'parent'\*

## If I have Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), is my newborn at risk?

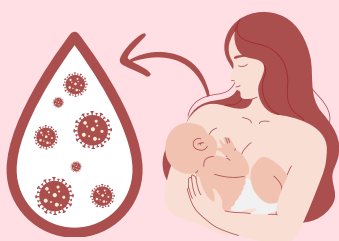
Yes, this is called **vertical transmission** of HIV. It may be passed from mother to baby in 3 main ways [1]:

- 1** During **pregnancy** – when the virus crosses the placenta
- 2** During **delivery** – through the baby's exposure to body fluids
- 3** Through **breastfeeding** – if breast milk contains HIV

Even if your child is born without HIV, milk feeding methods should be carefully considered.

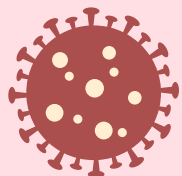
## HOW IS HIV TRANSMITTED DURING FEEDING?

### Exposure Route



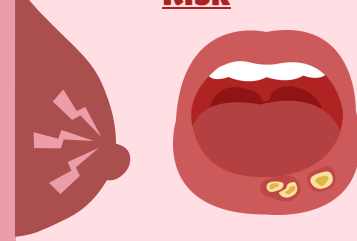
HIV can be present in **breast milk**. A baby's **mouth and digestive tract** can absorb the virus during feeding [2]

### Viral Load Matters



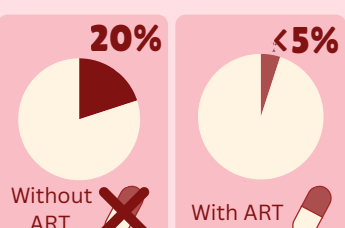
A mother's HIV viral load (i.e. the amount of virus in body) is the **greatest HIV risk factor** when breastfeeding. **Higher viral load = higher transmission risk** [3]

### Factors Increasing Risk



Inflamed breasts or a baby's mouth sores **increase milk viral load** and risk of HIV transmission while breastfeeding [4]

### Risk of Transmission in Breastfeeding



Missing **Antiretroviral therapy (ART) doses**, having a detectable **viral load**, or poor **adherence** increase transmission risk [3, 5, 6]

## What is the TRUTH about newborn feeding?

## Canadian Consensus Guidelines on Infant Feeding

Mothers living with HIV are generally advised to **avoid** breastfeeding their infants [7]



Exclusive **formula feeding** is the safest option, giving your baby a **0% risk of HIV transmission** [7]



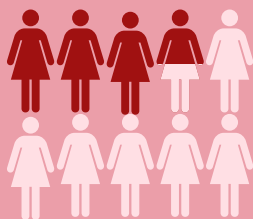
### Myth

Not breastfeeding will reveal your positive HIV status to others.



### Fact

Only **35%** of Canadians exclusively breastfeed [10]



It's your **choice** to decide how to feed your baby!



## Feeding Methods & HIV Transmission Rates [3,6]

Exclusive Formula feeding:

6 months: 0%

12 months: 0%

SAFEST Method!

Breastfeeding (when HIV+ Mothers are on Antiretroviral Therapy (ART)):

6 months: ~3%

12 months: ~4%

More Risk!

Breastfeeding offers unique benefits such as boosting immune function [8]

**If you choose to breastfeed, Canadian Guidelines recommend:**

Work with your doctors to create a **personalized HIV treatment plan** [8]



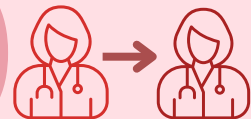
**Strictly adhering** to ART treatment to reduce the risk of HIV transmission [7, 8]

Regular monthly check-ups throughout the **entire** breastfeeding duration [8]



Consider **donor breastmilk** from milk banks [7]

If your doctor is unable to support your decision to breastfeed, you can ask to be **referred** to someone else who can [7]



**Regardless of feeding method, all infants born to a mother living with HIV are recommended to begin HIV treatment after birth** [9]

## My Mental Health



Pregnant and postpartum women living with HIV may experience **high levels of depression, distress, and anxiety** [11]

## What Can I Do?



Consult **healthcare professionals & social workers** to support you and your baby long-term

## Fighting Stigma Together



**77%** of Canadian women living with HIV felt **supported** with formula feeding by their healthcare network [12]

## For the Mother

### Breast Care:

If you are not breastfeeding, ease breast swelling by [13]:

- Wearing a supportive bra
- Avoiding pumping
- Talking to your doctor about cabergoline medicine to stop milk production

### Bonding:

Worried about not bonding with your baby if you don't breastfeed?

- Holding, talking, making eye contact, and singing to your baby are all great ways to connect! [13]

## Next Steps

### CATIE Resources

CATIE is a reliable source for HIV information funded by the Canadian government.



Find more brochures, webinars & resources on HIV+ infant feeding at the QR code below! [14]



## For the Baby

### Protecting your Baby:



Attend regular check-up appointments to monitor any post-natal antiretroviral therapy (ART) side effects (including anemia & neutropenia) to help keep your baby safe [7]

### Safe Feeding:



If you choose to breastfeed, consider nursing for only a **few weeks or months** and switch to formula before introducing solids (around 4-6 months) to lower the risk of passing HIV [13]

