

## **Guidance for parents and carers concerning infants and COVID-19**

<b>Document information</b>	
Version number	2
Original publication date	26/03/20
Developed by	Health and Social Policy Branch
Consultation	
Endorsed by	Dr Nigel Lyons, Deputy Secretary, Health System Strategy and Planning
Review date	29/04/2020
Reviewed by	Publicly available information has been consolidated for ease of access through the NSW Health COVID-19 Frequently asked questions (FAQ) webpage Reviewed by Clinical Lead, COP Child and Family Health Input provided by Health Protection NSW
For use by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• NSW Health COVID-19 FAQ webpage</li><li>• Maternity, neonatal, paediatric and child and family health services</li></ul>

The following information is available for parents and carers on the NSW Health COVID-19 FAQ webpage.

### **How can I protect myself / my family?**

The best way to protect yourself is the same as you would against any respiratory infection. Practice good hygiene by:

- making sure to clean your hands thoroughly for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub
- cover your nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing with tissue or a flexed elbow
- avoid close contact with anyone with cold or flu-like symptoms.

Make sure you stay home if you are sick.

The Raising Children Network has information and an advice line about coronavirus and children including links to resources for parents on talking to children about potentially distressing events. <https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/coronavirus-covid-19-guide/coronavirus-and-children-in-australia>

Centres for Disease Control and Prevention has information on steps to protect the health of your family <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/protect-family.html>

Up to date information is available on NSW Health Facebook and Twitter.

### **How can I protect my baby?**

The NSW Government website has information on [how to protect yourself and others](#).

Everyone in the family should have the seasonal influenza (flu) vaccination when it becomes available. Babies can have the seasonal influenza vaccine from 6 months of age - the vaccine is free for all children aged 6 months to less than 5 years of age. For more information, including a list of all groups eligible for free seasonal influenza vaccine, go to the NSW Health webpage [Seasonal influenza vaccination 2020](#).

Make sure vaccinations are up to date. Routine vaccination is the safest, most effective way to protect babies and children from illness.

### **If I have suspected or confirmed COVID-19 can I continue to feed my baby?**

#### **Breastfeeding**

Yes, you can continue to breastfeed or feed your baby expressed breastmilk.

The benefits of feeding your baby breastmilk outweigh any potential risk of transmission of coronavirus through breastmilk.

To avoid spreading the virus, wear a face mask when you are less than 1.5 metres from your baby (including while feeding), wash your hands before and after contact with your baby (including feeding), and avoid coughing or sneezing on the baby while feeding. Also clean/disinfect contaminated surfaces. Your health professional will talk with you about how long you need to continue these extra precautions.

If you are too ill to breastfeed, try to express milk for your baby. Consider whether someone who is well can feed the expressed breast milk to your baby by a bottle, cup or spoon, following appropriate infection prevention methods. You can discuss feeding options with your health professional.

Strict hygiene is needed when expressing breastmilk. If expressing breastmilk by hand or with a manual or electric breast pump, the mother should wash her hands before touching her breast, the pump and bottle parts. Follow the recommendations from the manufacturer for pump cleaning after each use. The Raising Children Network provides guidance on [Expressing and storing breastmilk](#) including how to keep your expressing equipment clean.

The Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) has advice about [COVID-19 and breastfeeding](#)

The ABA runs the [National Breastfeeding Helpline](#) 1800 mum 2 mum (1800 686 268). The Breastfeeding Helpline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

### **Formula Feeding**

Yes, you can continue to formula feed your baby.

To avoid spreading the virus, wear a face mask when you are less than 1.5 metres from your baby (including feeding), wash your hands before and after contact with your baby (including feeding), and avoid coughing or sneezing on the baby while feeding. Also clean/disinfect contaminated surfaces. Your health professional will talk with you about how long you need to continue these extra precautions.

Strict hygiene is needed when handling feeding equipment. Follow the advice provided by the Raising Children Network on [Bottle feeding: cleaning and sterilising equipment](#)

The UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative UK site has information about [infant feeding during the COVID-19 outbreak](#)

### **What if I can't get my usual baby formula?**

Infant formula should be used for babies in the first year of life. Don't use follow on formula for any baby under 12 months – only use infant formula.

If you are unable to get your usual brand of infant formula, don't worry – you can use any infant formula as all preparations have a similar nutritional composition to comply with legislation.

If you are using particular formulas for a clinical reason (for example, allergies or reflux) and can't access these, speak with your health professional.

Always prepare infant formula according to the instructions on the tin – do not be tempted to add more water to make it last longer as diluting the milk could endanger your baby's health.