

## HIV and infant feeding

Women who are HIV infected can pass HIV to their babies during pregnancy, labour and delivery or through breastfeeding. It is important for every pregnant woman to be tested and to know her status so she can learn how to protect her baby from HIV.

Not all babies born to HIV infected mothers will become infected. There are ways to protect the baby from HIV, which is why it is important to go to a health facility during pregnancy.

There are things that increase the risk of HIV transmission:

- If the mother has been recently infected or re-infected with HIV
- If the mother has AIDS
- The mother's general health and nutritional status
- Breast health
- Breastfeeding and giving other foods or liquids, even water
- How long a mother breastfeeds
- Health of the baby's mouth and digestive tract

For most women who are HIV positive, exclusive breastfeeding will be the safest option for their baby. This means the baby receives only breastmilk during the first 6 months of life and does not receive any other milk, food, water, juices, teas or other liquids. Breastfeeding and giving other foods during the first 6 months can greatly increase the risk of the baby becoming infected.

# Exclusive Breastfeeding



## **Exclusive breastfeeding is important**

- Breast milk is the perfect food for babies. It has everything a baby needs to grow and develop during the first 6 months of life.
- During the first six months, your baby needs only breast milk. No other foods, liquids, or water are needed. However, medicines can be given when medically prescribed.
- When a mother feeds her baby only breast milk for the first 6 months, it is called exclusive breastfeeding.
- It is very important to practice exclusive breastfeeding within the first hour of birth until your baby has completed 6 months.
- The yellowish or watery milk that comes in during the first few days is called colostrum. It is very important because it protects your baby from many diseases.
- Breastmilk is ideal for preterm babies.
- Continue breastfeeding after six months, while also giving starting to give solid foods foods, until the baby is two years (24 months).
- Every mother should know their HIV status. If negative she can be supported to remain negative, if positive she can be counselled on how to protect her baby from HIV infection.

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## **Exclusive breastfeeding needs family and community support**



## **Benefits of Breastfeeding:**

Breastfeeding has many benefits to the baby, the mother, the family and the community:

### **Benefits to the baby:**

- It is the perfect food. It contains all the nutrients in proper amounts.
- It helps prevent infections and stimulates baby's immune system.
- It protects the baby from common child illnesses.
- It supports growth and development of the baby.
- It is easy for the baby to digest.

### **Benefits to the mother:**

- It protects the mother from becoming pregnant again soon after giving birth.
- It promotes bonding between the mother and the baby.
- It helps the uterus to go back to its position.
- It is free, always available, and always at the right temperature for feeding.
- It reduces risk of breast and ovarian cancers.

### **Benefits to the family and community**

- Is available 24 hours a day
- Reduces cost for medicines for sick baby
- Delays new pregnancy
- Reduces time lost from work
- More money available for other family needs