

Understanding International Policy on HIV and Breastfeeding: a comprehensive resource



This HIV Kit (2nd Edition, 2018) provides an overview of infant feeding in the context of HIV. The content is based on evidence available at the time of writing (2018). HIV is an area of active research and new information becomes available all the time. Sources are listed from which you can access the latest information. There are six sections, with information, issues to think about and to discuss, actions to take, and contacts for further resources.

SECTION 1: Introduction

The first section reviews basic facts about HIV, including the three routes of HIV transmission and an overview of the incidence, prevalence and mortality of HIV, as well as information about pediatric HIV. The types of HIV testing are outlined, especially for vertical transmission, as well as HIV testing for infants. Emphasis is on the importance of antiretroviral therapy and prevention of vertical transmission of HIV to infants. At the end of this section a toolkit for prevention and treatment of HIV infection in pregnant women, mothers and children is presented.

SECTION 2: Guidelines and recommendations for antiretroviral (ARV) drugs, antiretroviral treatment (ART) and Prophylaxis

In the second section, guidelines and recommendations for antiretroviral treatment and prophylaxis are given, with WHO recommendations on cost effective prophylaxis to reduce postnatal transmission. Recommended policies and programs are described, which should cover HIV prevention and access to family planning and support to women living with HIV.

SECTION 3: Care for mothers and babies

The third section discusses how HIV affects the lives of women in their societies and communities and describes which treatment should be considered. Breastfeeding has many benefits for mothers, however there are special health care and nutritional requirements for HIV women. The risk of vertical transmission of HIV through pregnancy, labor, birth and breastfeeding is assessed. The importance of exclusive and continued breastfeeding to maximize infant HIV-free survival through protective properties of human milk is also described.

SECTION 4: The importance of breastfeeding to infant and young child health and HIV-free survival

In the fourth section, the importance of breastfeeding is presented with the description of the key elements of HIV and Infant Feeding Guidelines. Breastfeeding is highlighted as the safest feeding option when antiretroviral drugs are available. Sound breastfeeding practices with the introduction of complementary feeding are also described, as are methods of breastmilk expression, and storage and pasteurization of human milk. In contrast the health outcomes of formula fed infants are delineated, which can lead to increased malnutrition, morbidity and mortality. Guidance is given on replacement feeding with artificial milk. This section also includes recommendations on wet nursing.

SECTION 5: How to support women living with HIV

The urgent topic of how to support women living with HIV is analyzed in section five. The rights and choices of women, as well as their challenges are described. Emphasis lies on the counseling of women, based on the current recommendations. The urgent need to train health care workers is described as well as the importance of protection from marketing of formula as covered under the Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.

SECTION 6: Glossary, definitions, acronyms, abbreviations, references and additional resources

A list of policy documents and reports, training materials, videos and manuals in section six completes this extensive HIV Kit.

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The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide. WABA action is based on the Innocenti Declaration, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the Global Strategy for Infant & Young Child Feeding. WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA): PO Box 1200, 10850 Penang, Malaysia
T: 60-4-658 4816 • F 60-4-657 2655 • E: waba@waba.org.my • W: www.waba.org.my