

WABA/ABM Joint Statement on World AIDS Day 2019



World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action



1 December 2019

Breastfeeding & HIV-free survival - Communities make the difference!



Every day, about 400 children under 15 years of age become infected with HIV. Without intervention and support, many infants get infected during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding. This year's theme for World AIDS Day is "Communities make the difference". Communities play a vital role in ensuring the success of breastfeeding, especially in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Globally, it has been established that optimal breastfeeding helps prevent malnutrition in all its forms with positive lifelong effects on both children and mothers. This is true even in the context of HIV/AIDS. Early detection, medical treatment and other forms of support are vital in preventing HIV transmission.

The health authority in each country should consider international recommendations in deciding the most appropriate infant feeding strategy at the national level, to maximise the chance of infants surviving and remaining HIV-free. This requires considering the local context - comparing the risk of infants contracting HIV by breastfeeding and the risk of dying from pneumonia, diarrhoea or another illness from not breastfeeding. Exclusive breastfeeding for six months, with appropriate antiretroviral (ARV) therapy, and continued breastfeeding with adequate complementary foods to 24 months or beyond is the safest feeding option, leading to maximum HIV-free survival in most low-income settings.

If mothers living with HIV are provided with ARV therapy and exclusively breastfeed for the first six months of life, the transmission of HIV to the infant can be reduced to almost zero (between 0-1%). Even when ARV drugs are not immediately available, breastfeeding may still provide infants born to mothers living with HIV a greater chance of HIV-free survival. Exclusive breastfeeding is better for all breastfed infants and their mothers, but even more important in the context of HIV where mixed feeding carries the highest risk of

transmission. Informed decisions should be supported, and communities have an important role to play in supporting breastfeeding women and their families.

WHAT COMMUNITIES CAN DO:

1. Stay informed - get accurate and updated information on breastfeeding in the context of HIV through resources such as the WABA “Breastfeeding in the context of HIV/AIDS - what you need to know” pamphlet and the [Understanding International Policy on HIV and Breastfeeding: a comprehensive resource](#).
2. Create a warm chain of support - Community leaders, in collaboration with global and national leaders, can work to prevent the vertical transmission of HIV to infants by establishing a [warm chain of support](#) for breastfeeding. By interacting and providing consistent messages and appropriate referrals, communities can support mothers to exclusively breastfeed.
3. Provide skilled breastfeeding support - Mothers living with HIV may need help and support in dealing with breastfeeding problems. Communities can ensure that mothers have access to skilled, trained healthcare workers, lactation consultants and counsellors who can provide timely and accurate information, as well as practical and emotional support to breastfeeding mothers living with HIV.
4. Use platforms/tools to spread knowledge - Communities can use social media and other creative channels to ensure families have the information they need to make decisions on how to feed their babies. Communities can engage men, partners, other family members, community workers and volunteers to support mothers through mother-to-mother groups or peer counselling programs in healthcare settings.
5. Address stigma and empower women - Human rights are central to the HIV/AIDS response. It is important to be aware of issues that affect women and cause developmental, physical, behavioural and sexual harm. Communities can play a part in addressing the stigma related to breastfeeding and advocate for health policies and programmes that empower women and girls to reduce their vulnerability to HIV. Ideas for how to support mothers will vary based on cultural contexts, and local communities can include these considerations in advocating for change.

Together, we can take action to improve the health of breastfeeding mothers and their babies in the context of HIV/AIDS. Communities make the difference, and everybody wins when mothers and babies are healthier!



Resources:

1. World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action - WABA. (2019). Breastfeeding in the context of HIV/AIDS - What you need to know. Retrieved from <http://waba.org.my/>
2. World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action - WABA. (n.d.). Warm chain cards. Retrieved from <http://waba.org.my/warm-chain-card/>
3. World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action - WABA. (2018). Understanding international policy on HIV and breastfeeding: A Comprehensive resource. Retrieved from <http://waba.org.my/understanding-international-policy-on-hiv-and-breastfeeding-a-comprehensive-resource/>
4. World Health Organization. (2016). Updates on HIV and infant feeding - Guideline. Retrieved

https://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/hivaids/guideline_hiv_infantfeeding_2016/en/

5. British HIV Association. (2019). British HIV Association guidelines for the management of HIV in pregnancy and postpartum 2018. Retrieved from https://www.bhiva.org/file/5bfd30be95deb/BHIVA-guidelines-for-the-management-of-HIV-in-pregnancy.pdfng_2016/en/
6. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS. (2019). World AIDS Day 2019 - Communities make the difference. Retrieved from https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/campaigns/WAD_2019



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World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations dedicated to the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and 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). WABA coordinates the annual World Breastfeeding Week campaign.

WABA | WORLD BREASTFEEDING WEEK (WBW) 1 - 7 August

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