

World AIDS Day 2020 WABA/ABM Joint Statement

1 December 2020



World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action



Breastfeeding & HIV-free survival - Global solidarity, shared responsibility

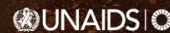


If you became ill, would you be able to access health care?

In 2019, 2.57 million people living with HIV were affected by humanitarian disasters.

WORLD AIDS DAY

GLOBAL SOLIDARITY
SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



The COVID-19 pandemic threatens the wellbeing, livelihoods and economic conditions of millions of families worldwide. This year, the theme of [World AIDS Day](#) is “global solidarity, shared responsibility”. Each and every one of us needs to come together to eliminate the stigma and discrimination, put people at the centre and ground our responses in human rights and gender-responsive approaches to end the colliding pandemics of HIV and COVID-19.

Infant mortality in the first year of life is very high in untreated HIV-infected infants. HIV-exposed infants should have access to early HIV testing with a prompt return of results, rapid initiation of treatment and continued breastfeeding in order to improve their chances of survival. Breastfeeding provides infants born to HIV-infected mothers with a [greater chance of HIV-free survival](#). Breastfeeding also has lifelong health benefits for mothers, however, the challenges for women to breastfeed are far and wide, especially in the context of HIV.

Understanding International Policy on HIV and Breastfeeding: a comprehensive resource

2nd Edition, 2018

This DVD contains a HIV Kit that provides an overview of infant feeding in the context of HIV. There are six sections, with information, references, issues to think about and to discuss, actions to take and contacts for further resources.

- SECTION 1 Introduction
- SECTION 2 Guidelines and recommendations for antiretroviral (ARV) drugs, antiretroviral treatment (ART) and Physicians
- SECTION 3 Care for mothers and babies
- SECTION 4 The importance of breastfeeding to infant and young child health and HIV-free survival
- SECTION 5 How to support women living with HIV
- SECTION 6 Glossary, definitions, acronyms, abbreviations, references and additional resources



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The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is another emergency that leaves families with children in an extremely vulnerable position. Breastfeeding is all the more important during COVID-19 as it helps to build the child's immune system. To date, there is no evidence that the virus can be transmitted through breastfeeding. **WHO and other international organisations recommend** that mothers with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 should be encouraged to initiate or continue to breastfeed. Mothers should be counselled that the benefits of breastfeeding substantially outweigh the potential risks for transmission. It is vital that we work together to provide timely and consistent information on the benefits of breastfeeding and methods to breastfeed safely.

One such method of providing accurate and consistent information is through breastfeeding counselling. Breastfeeding counselling is known to be effective and should be offered as a key feature of support to all breastfeeding families. Counselling also provides the **necessary information** for infant feeding in the context of HIV. To prevent and resolve common breastfeeding difficulties and overcome the pressure to follow inappropriate infant feeding practices such as premature mixed feeding, mothers need:

- Accurate, consistent information, guidance and skilled assistance from knowledgeable and empathetic healthcare and community workers
- Regular counselling and support provided in their homes and in the community close to where mothers live
- Accurate and updated information to family members
- Support for HIV-free survival and optimal growth of their babies and young children



In every emergency, it is necessary to assess and act to protect and support the nutritional needs and care of both breastfed and non-breastfed infants and young children. It is our duty as global citizens to come together to ensure that:

1. **Health is fully financed.** Breastfeeding is one of the best investments in saving infant lives and improving the health, social and economic development of individuals and nations. Governments need to come together to increase funding, monitoring and implementation of better policies and interventions to provide families with the support for breastfeeding that they need, especially breastfeeding counselling. Breastfeeding counselling is essential for increasing breastfeeding rates.
2. **Health systems are strengthened.** Mothers living with HIV may need help and support in dealing with breastfeeding problems. Decision-makers 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. Invest in

consistent training programmes for different levels of health professionals, lactation consultants, community health workers and lay/peer supporters to ensure effective capacity building and skills development at all levels.

3. **Access is ensured.** Some families may be more vulnerable and require additional breastfeeding support. Vulnerable situations include emergencies, special needs or other medical conditions affecting the breastfeeding dyad. Strategies to protect, promote and support breastfeeding are well-known and need to be implemented and monitored. 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.
4. **Human rights are respected.** Every child has the right to good nutrition, and breastmilk is the first food. All women/parents have the right to be supported by society to breastfeed optimally. They can benefit from many different kinds of support, e.g. skilled breastfeeding counselling depending on their sociocultural context. Support can come from their families, communities, health systems and workplaces. Policies that protect maternity rights, while allowing for a more equal distribution of the burden of care, are integral to achieving greater gender equality and empowerment.
5. **The rights of women and girls, and gender equality, are at the centre.** 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.

This World AIDS Day 2020, we need to work together to ensure breastfeeding is key to HIV-free survival, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through global solidarity and shared responsibility, we can address the effects of these colliding pandemics on breastfeeding families everywhere.



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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.

www.waba.org.my

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