

# World AIDS Day 2021

## WABA/ABM Joint Statement



World Alliance for  
Breastfeeding Action



1 December 2021

Supporting breastfeeding for a healthier  
future, leaving no one behind



“End inequalities. End AIDS. End pandemics.” This is the theme of [World AIDS Day 2021](#). It reminds us that we have to work together to end inequalities, HIV/AIDS and pandemics - a particularly relevant theme now that we are in the process of building back better and striving for a new normal post-pandemic. Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the HIV/AIDS global epidemic are aggravated by economic, social, cultural and legal inequalities, and these inequalities then worsen the spread of pandemics - leading to a vicious cycle.

An example of this cycle is that in the case of HIV/AIDS, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult to get access to testing for HIV due to decreased accessibility to health care and regulations relating to quarantine and social distancing. The capacity for an already vulnerable health care system may be further reduced, resulting in a delay of ART (antiretroviral therapy) (Lancet HIV 2020). Workers have been laid off during the COVID-19 pandemic and this may result in patients not being able to pay for their medications, making HIV treatment less accessible. This can lead to suboptimal treatment and reduced doses for patients, especially for the most vulnerable (Trop Med Health 2020).

All of these factors and consequences make the COVID-19 pandemic a major threat in the global effort to end HIV/AIDS and achieve the UNAIDS 90:90:90 goals. To overcome this, we have to work together to identify and address worldwide social, economic, and legal inequalities, as in so many other health issues like breastfeeding and the care of newborns and new parents. Only then can real progress be made possible in the battle against the morbidity and mortality of these pandemics.



In every emergency situation, it is necessary to assess and support the nutritional needs and care of both breastfed and non-breastfed infants and young children. Exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months with appropriate ART and continued breastfeeding with adequate complementary foods up to 24 months or beyond can be the safest feeding option in many countries. It is vital that global and national evidence-based guidelines are aligned to ensure that consistent messages relating to best practices reach the public. For example, governments and health care systems have a responsibility to ensure that BFHI is implemented in both the public and private health care sectors. Countries need to track the impact of the pandemic on breastfeeding, investigate the needs of families with breastfeeding babies, especially marginalised groups, and develop effective ways to help them fulfill their breastfeeding goals. This can best be done through engagement and coordination of all parts of the health care system and beyond. As the WABA Warm Chain campaign proposes, this means creating a warm chain of support that emphasises each individual role and shared responsibility to support and protect breastfeeding, especially for vulnerable groups such as those affected/living with HIV/AIDS.

Breastfeeding is a human right that needs to be respected, protected and fulfilled. A public health approach to breastfeeding, where governments and other stakeholders work together to create a breastfeeding-friendly environment, is a vital part of protecting and supporting breastfeeding, presently and post-pandemic.

**References:**

- [World AIDS Day 2021 - END INEQUALITIES. END AIDS. END PANDEMICS.](#)
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- tuberculosis and malaria control? Tropical Med Health 2020; 48: 32
- Jiang H, Zhou Y, Tang W: Maintaining HIV care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lancet HIV 2020; 7(5):e308-30
  - **UNAIDS Press Release**: UNAIDS report shows that people living with HIV face a double jeopardy, HIV and COVID-19, while key populations and children continue to be left behind in access to HIV services.
  - **World Breastfeeding Week 2021 Action Folder** - Protect Breastfeeding: A Shared Responsibility.
  - **Breastfeeding In The Context Of HIV/AIDS – What You Need To Know.**



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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](http://www.waba.org.my)