



COVID-19 and Breastfeeding

By Vanessa Mack, WIC Coordinator

With the world in the midst of a global pandemic, it is a good time to recognize the important role breastfeeding plays in protecting babies from germs all across the planet.

As the world's leading scientists race to find a COVID-19 vaccine, humans have their own, natural way of protecting the next generation. Moms, through breast milk, pass on helpful antibodies that fight germs.

Though it is too early to know for sure, researchers are finding evidence that moms who previously had COVID-19 may pass on helpful antibodies that can fight the virus.

Parents may worry about the safety of breastfeeding during the pandemic. However, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends breastfeeding. The benefits outweigh the potential risk of spreading the virus to the baby. In addition, researchers have not detected virus in breastmilk. Even when a mother has COVID-19, she is advised to still breastfeed while practicing hand hygiene and wearing a mask when with baby.

This year's global breastfeeding focus emphasizes how environmentally-friendly and economical it is. Human milk is a natural, renewable food produced and delivered to babies without pollution, packaging, or waste.

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected people of color and those that have underlying social, economic, and health disparities. These same underlying factors have made it more difficult over the years for many Minnesotans to breastfeed. Supporting breastfeeding through a culturally appropriate approach and with those that have underlying social, economic, and health disparities improves breastfeeding rates across groups.

"Overall breastfeeding rates among Minnesota WIC participants have declined in the pandemic," said Vanessa Mack, WIC Coordinator. "Let's not forget to prioritize breastfeeding, as in doing so we promote the health of our families, communities and the environment."

Brown County Public Health's Maternal Child Health department supports pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women in a variety of way through the following programs: new baby visits, Family Home Visiting, and WIC. All of our staff are trained and have the necessary credentials to provide lactation counseling and support. We offer information, education, resources and referrals aimed to help breastfeeding (and non-breastfeeding!) families meet their needs and goals.

To connect with Brown County Maternal Child Health, please contact our Public Health main line at 507-233-6820 or text us at 507-276-6174. Find us on Facebook @BCPublicHealth. For more information on COVID-19 and breastfeeding, visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/care-for-breastfeeding-women.html> or <https://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/reports/bf/covid19.pdf>