



A WORLDWIDE NETWORK OF LACTATION PROFESSIONALS

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BREASTFEEDING PROTECTS BABIES DURING FLU SEASON

As families prepare for flu season and the release of vaccines for both the seasonal flu and Influenza A (H1N1), the International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA) urges mothers, health care workers, and communities at large to promote, support, and encourage breastfeeding, which provides infants with antibodies that can help fight illness and disease. ILCA also strongly encourages all pregnant and breastfeeding mothers to become immunized with the influenza vaccines for both seasonal flu and the H1N1 influenza. Both of these vaccines are considered safe during pregnancy and breastfeeding, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and provide protection to infants, as well, after they are born.

To learn more about how to keep babies safe during flu season, ILCA provides a free downloadable resource for parents, "Tips for Breastfeeding During Flu Season," available at www.ilca.org.

Both the WHO and CDC, as well as other national and international authorities, also recommend breastfeeding as an important way to safeguard infant health during flu season. Research shows that exclusive breastfeeding makes a significant impact on infant health, particularly important during flu season when colds and respiratory infections are common. Exclusive breastfeeding

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for the first 6 months of life helps reduce respiratory problems (including the flu), and complications of the flu such as diarrhea and pneumonia.

According to Angela Smith, President of the International Lactation Consultant Association, even when a mother herself becomes ill, she should continue to breastfeed. By the time a mother first begins showing symptoms of the flu, her baby has already been exposed. “The good news,” says Smith, “is that when these symptoms first appear, the mother’s body is already producing antibodies to help her get well. These antibodies pass through her milk to protect her baby, as well.”

Smith also noted that continued breastfeeding is important as babies grow. “This is critically important during the first 6 months when babies are too young to receive a flu vaccine,” she says. “As babies become older and explore their world, they are exposed to even more germs. Mothers who continue breastfeeding provide ongoing protection to their babies.”

Smith noted that in addition to breastfeeding and vaccinations, there are other precautions that families can take to help keep their babies safe during flu season.

1. Practice good hygiene, including washing hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub, especially before handling the baby.
2. Use a disposable tissue to cover the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and discard it immediately after using it.
3. Wear a surgical mask if they are ill when they are around the baby.
4. Keep visitors to a minimum, and ask that visitors with flu symptoms to postpone their visit until they are better.
5. Avoid crowds during the early weeks after the baby is born.

To get a good start with breastfeeding, ILCA encourages mothers to hold their infants “skin to skin” in the first hour after birth to help baby become accustomed to his new world and to follow his natural instincts to breastfeed. Mothers can also room in with their infants to keep them away

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from other germs, avoid pacifiers in the early days since they cannot be easily cleaned from flu viruses, follow their baby’s cues to feed, and breastfeed 8-12 times every 24 hours.

“We urge health care providers and families across the world to promote, protect, and support breastfeeding during this and other times of emergency,” says Smith. “New mothers need accurate information and support to continue providing their infants with the best protection of all: mother’s milk.”

International Board Certified Lactation Consultants (IBCLCs) are credentialed health care professionals who focus on assisting mothers with initiating and continuing breastfeeding. To access an IBCLC in her community, ask your hospital nurse or physician, or check the “Find a Lactation Consultant Directory” at the ILCA website at www.ilca.org. You can also contact the ILCA office at info@ilca.org, or phone (919) 861-5577.