

Infant Feeding Options for people with HIV



Nursing (also called breastfeeding or chest feeding) your baby is now an option for people with HIV in the United States. In 2023, the CDC made an update for people taking HIV meds and staying undetectable throughout pregnancy and nursing. The risk of transmission of HIV to baby through nursing is less than 1%, but not zero. (Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Breastfeeding).

MetroHealth's Center of Excellence in HIV Care & Prevention supports a shared decision-making model when it comes to how you choose to feed your baby. This means that we will talk to you about the pros and cons of nursing and bottle-feeding with formula, give our guidance for your specific situation, and provide educational information. Then we will support your decision on what is right for you and your baby. Please note, if you choose to nurse, you must exclusively nurse, no supplementing with formula feeding.

Here are some pros and cons for you to think about:

FORMULA FEEDING

Pros

- Zero risk of HIV transmission
- Others can help with feeding
- Easy to feed your baby in public
- Knowing exactly how much baby is eating

Cons

- Formula is expensive (WIC can help!)
- Family and friends might ask why you are not nursing
- Need to be prepared and bottles sterilized

NURSING (Breastfeeding / Chest Feeding)

Pros

- Costs nothing extra
- Gives optimal nutrients to baby
- Skin-to-skin contact is good for bonding with your baby

Cons

- Small risk (<1%) of HIV transmission
- Nursing may feel uncomfortable at first
- Risk of cracked nipples / mastitis

Things to note if you choose to breastfeed / chest feed:

- You must exclusively nurse your baby – no supplementing with formula.
- Baby may need to stay on medicine longer than 2-4 weeks after being born, depending on the Pediatric ID doctor’s recommendation.
- Baby may need additional blood draws.
- Birthing parent’s viral load will be checked more often.
- Communication with your HIV doctor and baby’s pediatrician is key to successful nursing.

Starting breastfeeding:

- Talk to your care team and family about your feeding plans
- Ask for feeding support after you have your baby and make sure you feel comfortable before you leave the hospital. MetroHealth has lactation consultants available – ask to speak to one while you are in the hospital and connect with them when you get home at (216) 778-3337.