

The Baby And HIV/AIDS

Most women in PNG become infected with HIV through having sex with their infected partners.

A pregnant woman can be infected with HIV without knowing that she is infected. A woman infected with HIV can pass on the virus to her baby either in the womb, during delivery or when breastfeeding.

Can Mothers Breastfeed Their Baby If HIV Positive Or Have AIDS?

Yes, they can. In fact, HIV+ mothers are strongly advised to breastfeed their babies. There is a lower risk of infection when babies are breastfed by their mothers compared to the use of formula or other milk. However it must be **EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING**.

- Breastfeeding will protect your baby against deadly childhood diseases, especially diarrhoea.
- Breast milk is free so mothers don't have to worry about getting enough money to pay for it or getting clean water to mix it with.

What Is Exclusive Breastfeeding?

Exclusive Breastfeeding means that babies are given nothing but breast milk, not even water, for the first 4 months.

Babies should not be fed breast milk combined with liquids, not even water, or any other foods (called mixed feeding). Babies must not be fed by other mothers. A baby is more likely to get the HIV virus through mixed feeding.

Breastmilk only for the first 4 months

- No other liquids or food
- No breastfeeding by other mothers

Stop breastfeeding altogether after 4 months

- After 4 months give other milk and mashed foods

When To Stop Breastfeeding?

After four months of exclusive breastfeeding, a mother must stop breastfeeding altogether. The baby cannot have any more breast milk.

- The baby can then be given other milk and mashed foods.
- There should be no more breastfeeding once the baby starts other foods.
- Support from family and the community is needed so the mother is NOT tempted to breast feed again.

These symptoms can be expected:

- The baby may show signs of distress, loss of appetite and diarrhoea.
- The mother may develop soreness and swelling of the breast. A piece of warm lap lap (banana leaf) on the breast will relieve this.

What Other Choice Is Available Other Than Exclusive Breastfeeding?

With assistance from a health worker or counsellor some mothers can give their babies infant milk formula from birth, instead of breastfeeding. However, this is expensive and requires clean and safe water. Seek advice from health workers or Aids counsellors.