
NUTRITION MATTERS
HIV AND INFANT FEEDING: A BALANCE OF RISKS
Issue n.6; August 2004

Dear WCAR colleagues;

Breastfeeding is recommended as the best infant feeding option for the mother who is HIV-negative or who does not know her HIV-status. The mother who knows that she is infected and the health worker advising her need to understand the risks associated with different infant feeding options, as the use of breastmilk substitutes brings morbidity and mortality risks that need to be balanced against the risk of HIV transmission through breastfeeding.

UN agencies recommend avoidance of all breastfeeding by HIV-positive mothers when replacement feeding is acceptable, feasible, affordable, sustainable, and safe. Otherwise, exclusive breastfeeding is recommended during the first months of life. The appropriate time to transition from exclusive breastfeeding to exclusive replacement feeding depends on: a) the individual woman's situation; b) the risk of malnutrition and infection (other than HIV) associated with replacement feeding; and c) the potential increased risk of HIV transmission with mixed feeding if there is a transition period between exclusive breastfeeding and exclusive replacement feeding.

The authors investigated how the risk of mother-to-child transmission of HIV through breastfeeding compares with the risk of death from artificial feeding. They developed a simulation model to predict HIV-free survival in resource-poor settings from 0-24 months for different infant feeding scenarios. They found that, compared with artificial feeding, breastfeeding during the first six months by HIV-positive mothers increases HIV-free survival by 32 per 1000 live births. After six months, replacement feeding appears to be safer. The authors conclude that **under conditions common in countries with high HIV prevalence, replacement feeding by HIV-positive mothers should not be generally encouraged until the infant is approximately six months old.**

ENJOY! (... and share with your colleagues and counterparts).

Attached: Ross J and Labbok M. Modeling the effects of different infant feeding strategies on infant survival and mother-to-child transmission of HIV. American Journal of Public Health. July, 2004.

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