

Breastfeed Your Child for H1N1 Protection

La Leche League Canada November 12, 2009

Mothers are looking for ways to protect their children during the current H1N1 flu pandemic. Health authorities, including the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Canada's Public Health Agency (PHAC) have released guidelines on breastfeeding and the H1N1 virus. They all advise that breastfeeding should continue and increase in frequency if needed.

Continued breastfeeding is encouraged during this H1N1 outbreak because research has shown that human milk protects children against viruses in several ways. Although breastfeeding babies may catch viral infections, the unique protection given a breastfeeding child from his or her mother can reduce the severity of the illness in most children.

Breast milk is not a source of influenza virus infections for breastfeeding children. These viruses are spread by respiratory droplet transmission through coughing and sneezing.

Mothers who are breastfeeding are being encouraged, by the CDC and PHAC, to continue, even if they become sick with H1N1, or suspected H1N1 virus. Health authorities recommend that a mother who is sick should consider wearing a mask during feedings and while holding her child. If the mother is too sick to care for her baby, or hospitalized, the ideal situation would be to have the baby brought to her and assisted to breastfeed. If this is not possible, the mother should be assisted to express her milk for the baby so the milk can be fed to the child by a healthy caregiver. La Leche League Canada's volunteer Leaders can provide information about helping a baby to breastfeed when a mother is ill and expressing milk when needed.

All antiviral medications are considered compatible with breastfeeding, as is the H1N1 flu vaccine.

For mothers who are combined feeding (feeding both mother's milk and formula), La Leche League Canada and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend increasing the amount of breastmilk the child is receiving. Any amount of formula given to the child decreases the amount of breastmilk the child is receiving, and therefore also decreases the amount of protection he or she receives from the mother's antibodies and other immune factors contained in her breastmilk. La Leche League Canada's volunteer Leaders are experienced at helping mothers with issues such as increasing milk production and are a valuable resource for mothers wishing to provide their children with as much protection as possible during this cold and flu season and beyond.

Breastfeeding is an important component of protection for children against the H1N1 virus. For more facts on H1N1 and breastfeeding, or to find a local Leader, visit www.LLCC.ca.

For Additional Information, contact: Teresa Pitman, 519-829-2293, teresaannpitman@rogers.com