

# Should infants be separated from COVID-19-positive mothers?

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In a new commentary, Alison Stuebe, MD, President of the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine, addresses the risks and benefits of separating infants from COVID-19-positive mothers following birth. Although multiple public health organizations recommended keeping mothers and infants together, the United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advises facilities to consider separating mothers and babies temporarily until the mother is no longer contagious, and recommends that the risks and benefits of temporary separation should be discussed with the mother by the healthcare team.

In her commentary, Dr. Stuebe, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine and distinguished professor in infant and young child feeding at the Carolina Global Breastfeeding Institute at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, notes that there is no evidence to show that early separation of [infants](#) and mothers with suspected or confirmed COVID-19 improves outcomes. While separation may minimize the risk

of transmission of the virus from mother to infant during the [hospital stay](#), it has potential negative consequences for both mother and infant, according to the commentary published in *Breastfeeding Medicine*, the official journal of the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine published by Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., publishers.

Dr. Stuebe outlines several risks of separating mothers and infants in the hospital, which disrupts breastfeeding and skin-to-skin contact during the critical hours and days following birth. For example, infants who lack skin-to-[skin contact](#) with their mothers tend to have higher heart rates and respiratory rates and lower glucose levels. The separation also stresses the mother, which could make it more difficult for her to fight off the viral infection. In addition, separation interferes with the provision of maternal milk to the infant, which is important for the development of the infant's immune system. Separation also disrupts [breastfeeding](#), which puts the infant at increased risk of severe respiratory infections, including pneumonia and COVID-19.

"As we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic," Stuebe writes, "I am hopeful that we can center mothers and babies and remember to first do no harm."

Arthur I. Eidelman, MD, Editor-in-Chief of *Breastfeeding Medicine*, concurs that "there is no need or indication to categorically separate infants from COVID-19 suspect or positive mothers other than in circumstances wherein the mother's medical condition precludes her caring for the infant. Feeding [mothers'](#) own breast milk, either by nursing or by feeding of expressed milk, is OK and desired!"

**More information:** Alison Stuebe, Should Infants Be Separated from Mothers with COVID-19? First, Do No Harm, *Breastfeeding Medicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.1089/bfm.2020.29153.ams](https://doi.org/10.1089/bfm.2020.29153.ams)

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