

IMMUNIZATIONS & HUMAN MILK

Issue Guidance from MIBFN Breastfeeding & Emergencies Working Group

ACROSS HEALTH CARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH, WE MUST:

- Understand that current evidence suggests pregnant and recently pregnant persons are more likely to suffer severe illness and complications from COVID-19 infections compared to people who are not pregnant
- Understand that severe infections and death caused by COVID-19 have disproportionately impacted Black and Indigenous communities
- Advocate for culture change and guidance that explicitly protects birthing folks and their support systems within our hospital and public health organizations
- Ensure we, and the families we serve, are clear on the role of doulas, birth workers, and lactation supporters, in supporting families and their role in saving Black and Indigenous lives: Birth and breastfeeding supporters serve families by providing emotional, physical, spiritual, clinical and educational support. Black and Indigenous birth workers center Black and Indigenous cultural humility, trust, experience and safety
- Serve alongside families as advocates, educators, and birth workers with the clear understanding that it is up to the patients/clients to determine their own course of action

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A BETTER WAY FORWARD FOR PROVIDERS/PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS:

- Trust Black and Indigenous birthing people and their care teams, especially when they voice concerns over their health during pregnancy, labor, delivery, and postpartum
- Support breastfeeding and stress the importance of human milk based on multiple factors: protective against COVID-19; in the face of formula recalls and shortages, highlight the dangers of human milk substitutes and the health risks infant formula poses to infants
- Be educated about the value of human milk and risks of human milk substitutes - especially in light of the current COVID-19 pandemic
- Partner with, and equitably compensate, birth workers and breastfeeding clinicians who reflect and represent the families in the community where you serve to ensure families - and most specifically, Black and Indigenous families - have access to accurate information - including education and resources to prevent COVID-19 infection
- Ensure policies do not disproportionately impact Black and Indigenous families who are already marginalized and disproportionately impacted by COVID-19
- Operationalize equitable access to donor milk for families
- Remove birth team restrictions
- Eliminate vaccination mandates for birth workers
- Incorporate guidance from both domestic and international public health organizations, such as the WHO and CDC. While CDC is based in the US and is most widely cited in determining policy domestically, WHO reflects the worldwide population and is inclusive of evidence gathered in countries with more systemic support for birthing and breastfeeding families
- Provide equitable access to the most up to date evidence, information, and resources related to the benefits of timely vaccination to protect birthing and breastfeeding families from communicable diseases like COVID-19
- Protect breastfeeding, because breastfeeding protects against the spread of COVID-19
- Directly connect families with breastfeeding support and provide warm handoffs so that families receive the services they need from trusted community providers that listen to and immediately address their concerns to ensure quality care

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A BETTER WAY FORWARD FOR FAMILIES:

- Understand that COVID-19 guidance has evolved throughout the pandemic as new information has become available. At present, there is consensus among the major public health organizations (WHO and CDC included) that COVID-19 vaccines are a safe and effective tool to protect pregnant and breastfeeding people against COVID-19
- Consult with birth and breastfeeding supporters to find a skilled care team that reflects your values and works within their scope of practice to ensure your family receives safe and quality care. Obtain and review references
- Ask trusted healthcare providers who reflect your family's values and cultural traditions about the vaccines that are available for you and your baby, including vaccines to protect against COVID-19, influenza, and pertussis
- Practical day-to-day tips for birthing and breastfeeding families to consider to lower risk of COVID-19:
 - Hold a virtual or drive-by baby shower, or something held outdoors if a gathering is preferred
 - Create a visitor plan before you bring baby home and communicate to family and friends who may be coming to visit baby
 - Seek out a support person who can assist with decision-making and advocacy and supports your choices for your baby
 - Screen and/or limit visitors and who is allowed to hold baby
 - Require visitors/healthcare providers to wear a mask
 - Do not let others kiss your baby
 - Babywear to keep your baby close to you
 - Introduce your baby with family and friends via video call or through the window rather than in-person
 - Provide human milk for your baby!
 - Share evidence-based information with the people you care about
- Raise your concerns with providers before, during, and after pregnancy to address benefit to risk behavior. Medical guidance can change as situations & information changes