



Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India

(Registered Under Societies Registration
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Open Letter

To All Health Ministers in the States of India

SUBJECT: Separating Covid Positive Mothers and Babies: Abandoning Breastfeeding

**Hon'ble Ministers of Health,
State Governments,
Kind Attention: Secretary Health, State Governments**

Greetings from BPNI!

The Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India (BPNI) is a 30- year old organization working as a technical partner with MOHFW Government of India in the 'MAA programme' for promotion of breastfeeding in the health facilities. www.bpni.org. You may be aware that in India, more than 2 million babies are born each month, and at a given time more than 50 million women are breastfeeding. These 50 million women need to be made aware of accurate information on Covid and breastfeeding. You may also be aware of the scientific evidence that breastmilk carries antibodies to fight Covid-19.

We are deeply concerned about the information that mothers and babies are being separated for a few weeks after birth, if mother is Covid positive. Separation makes it extremely difficult for both of them to initiate and establish exclusive breastfeeding, which plays a critical role in building the newborn baby's immunity during such times of a pandemic. Hospitals may not be following the national and global recommendations for Covid positive mothers and breastfeeding. Separation only benefits the baby food companies. Please see the New Indian Express 23 May 2021. (<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/tamil-nadu/2021/may/23/baby-food-companies-pry-on-amma-sentiment-in-covid-times-2306347.html>)

We believe this to be the result of misleading information, not based on science, and comes at times when pregnant and lactating mothers are anxious and scared. It deprives the newborns of the protection, proper care, and emotional development. It may also result in unwanted sickness. The MOHFW Government of India, in 2020, responded to BPNI with the guidance. (Please see Annex).

WHO and UNICEF also recommend that breastfeeding be continued with mothers and babies staying together.

We, therefore, request your good self

- i) **Please issue guidelines /notification to healthcare providers in both government and private hospitals** not to separate mothers and babies, and continue breastfeeding; and
- ii) You may also need to **stop the misleading information using mass media on a daily basis** as thousands of babies are born every day.

This action may be monitored and action be taken on defaulters. For sure, your action will help hundreds and thousands of mothers and babies in your State.

With our best regards,

Sincerely,

**Dr. Arun Gupta, MD(Ped).
Central Coordinator, BPNI**

As a policy, BPNI does not accept funds of any kind from the companies manufacturing baby foods, feeding bottles etc. and from organization/industry having conflict of interest.

Annex-1

“Dear Dr. Arun,

Please refer your email to Hon'ble Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India, dated 17-04-2020 on the above subject. We appreciate your concern for Mothers and Babies. In this regard please find the response enclosed.

Regards,

Dr. TEJA RAM, MD
Joint Commissioner (MH)
Ministry of Health and Family Welfare
Government of India
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Response to concern on separation of Baby from Mother and bottle-feeding

- Ideally the mother and newborn should not be separated and continue skin to skin contact and initiate breastfeeding within first 60 minutes after the birth with precautionary measures of respiratory hygiene.
- In the context of COVID 19 pandemic, with the regards to breast feeding it is stated that there is no evidence of perinatal or transplacental transmission of virus from pregnant women with COVID -19 to child. However newborn is susceptible to person to person spread via droplets and inadequate infection prevention measures like hand washing.
- Based on the clinical condition of mother and newborn, the decision may be taken on case to case basis.
- The main risk of breastfeeding is close contact between mother and baby. If mother coughs or sneezes, this could contain droplets which are infected with the virus, leading to infection to the baby.
- Therefore, during breastfeeding by mother with COVID -19, following precautions are necessary-
 1. Mother should wear a mask and practice respiratory hygiene
 2. Mother should wash hands (for 40 seconds) before each feeding session
 3. Routinely disinfect and clean the surfaces
- If a woman with COVID -19 is too unwell to breastfeed, she can be supported to safely provide her baby with breast milk in other ways, including by- expressing milk and using donor human milk. Following precautions need to be taken while using expressed milk-
 1. Practice hand hygiene: Washing hands before touching breast pump or bottles
 2. A dedicated breast pump should be used.
 3. After each pumping session, all parts that come into contact with breast milk should be thoroughly washed and the entire pump should be appropriately disinfected per the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Expressed breast milk should be fed to the newborn by a healthy caregiver

Resources and Info graphics may be downloaded from here

<https://www.bpni.org/covid-19-and-breastfeeding-resources/>

