



DESMOND TUTU
HEALTH FOUNDATION

Can I breastfeed my baby if I'm living with HIV?

www.desmondtutuhealthfoundation.org.za



What's recommended

The mother should be on lifelong ART and adhere well to her medication and have suppressed viral load.

The baby is usually given antiretroviral prophylaxis (like nevirapine) for a period after birth.



Important to know

Exclusive breastfeeding is encouraged for the first 6 months (i.e., no other liquids or solids, not even water), followed by continued breastfeeding with complementary foods up to 12 months or longer depending on guidelines and health status.



What to avoid

Breastmilk alone is gentle and protective — adding other feeds can weaken the gut lining/barrier.

Mixed feeding (giving both breastmilk AND other foods/liquids in the first 6 months) can damage the gut increasing the risk of HIV transmission.

If you're unable or choose not to breastfeed, you're not alone — and you're not doing anything wrong – there are safe alternatives (e.g., formula feeding).