

5 HIV, Pregnancy and Breastfeeding

Pregnancy, childbirth and HIV



Without HIV treatment, mother-to-child transmission mostly happens during childbirth and through breastfeeding.



Transmission **can** happen during pregnancy, but this is less common.



HIV treatment minimises the risk of HIV passing from mother to child during pregnancy and childbirth by reducing the viral load in the body. It also helps the mother stay healthy.

Breastfeeding and HIV

- If a mother has an undetectable viral load and breastfeeds exclusively for the first 6 months, the possible risk of transmission through breastfeeding from mother-to-child is **1.1%**.
- The risk of HIV transmission **increases to 2.9%** when breastfeeding for more than 6 months.
- The risk is **10-20%** if the mother is not on HIV treatment or does not have an undetectable viral load.
- Women living with HIV have the right to make an **informed choice** if they wish to breastfeed or not, and to be fully supported in whatever decision they make.
- New Zealand Ministry of Health recommends that women living with HIV do not breastfeed their babies because: HIV can be transmitted via breast milk; although the risk is reduced through HIV treatment, there is not enough research showing the risk can be eliminated; **there are safe and effective alternatives** in New Zealand to breastfeeding, which provide enough nutrients for the baby.

