



Strengthening Midwifery Globally

EXCLUSIVE BREAST FEEDING AND HIV INFECTION

BACKGROUND

Research suggests that infants born to women who are HIV positive should be fed either exclusively by breast for at least six months, or by exclusive artificial means, in order to reduce viral transmission. Breast-feeding is especially important in contexts of poverty and when clean water and fuel resources are inadequate for safe artificial feeding, but may be affected by cultural norms or life circumstance. It is evident that policies, recommendations, support and information provision vary by locality and country, and that there is a wealth of ideas and experience that could be shared.

STATEMENT OF BELIEF

The International Confederation of Midwives believes that childbearing women need clear information about their infant feeding options in the presence of HIV infection, and support in achieving exclusive breast-feeding when that choice is made. The ICM also believes that the sharing between member associations of experience of policy initiatives and of support provided for women would enhance the services provided.

POSITION

The International Confederation of Midwives acknowledges the need for exclusive breast-feeding or artificial feeding when the mother is HIV positive and the difficulty in achieving safe artificial feeding or even perhaps, exclusive breast feeding, in certain circumstances. The ICM urges the gathering of experience and its dissemination to inform midwives, policy makers and other key workers in their support for women in achieving the above-mentioned options.

GUIDING STATEMENT TO MEMBER ASSOCIATIONS:

Member associations are urged to share with others their experiences of policy and information initiatives, and of supporting HIV-positive women in making and carrying out appropriate feeding choices, especially in helping women to achieve exclusive breast-feeding over at least six months where artificial feeding is unsafe. The regional representatives and the board of management of the ICM are urged to encourage:

- appropriate research around HIV and infant feeding, including exclusive breast-feeding.
- the establishment of a database or publication of shared experience.

RELATED ICM DOCUMENTS

- Breastfeeding. ICM Position Statement (1999)

OTHER RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

- Coutsooudis A *et al.* Method of feeding and transmission of HIV-1 from mothers to children by 15 months of age: prospective cohort study from Durban, South Africa. *AIDS* 2001; 15(3), 379-387.
- Zetterstrom R. 2000. Transmission of human immune deficiency virus type-1 from mother to infant. *Acta Paediatrica*; 89(11): 1273-1274.
- WHO. *Young Infant and Child Nutrition*. Resolution 54/7 by the World Health Assembly, Geneva, 2001
- WHO. HIV Transmission through breast feeding: A review of available evidence. WHO, 2004. www.who.int/child.adolescent;health/NewPublications/NUTRITION/ISBN_92_4_156271_4pdf

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