



SUDAN NATIONAL OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE ON INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD FEEDING (IYCF) DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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This document is intended for the nutrition programme at the national and subnational levels. The document suggests basic considerations on how infant and young child feeding recommendations might have to be adapted in the context of COVID-19 in different settings.



Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) at Isolation and health care centers:

Infant and Young Child Feeding Recommendations in context of COVID-19:

1. Initiate breastfeeding within 1 hour of birth.
2. Exclusively breastfeed for the first 6 months.
3. Introduce age-appropriate, adequate, safe and properly fed complementary foods starting from 6 months up to 2-years-old.
4. Continue breastfeeding for up to 2-years-age or beyond.



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Key Messages

- ✓ The COVID-19 virus has not been found in breast milk and transmission via breastfeeding has not been demonstrated, mothers with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 should continue breastfeeding while taking the necessary hygiene precautions (see Box 1) to prevent transmission to their children.
- ✓ Breastfeeding saves lives and protects against many infections. Particularly the antibodies and bio-active factors in breast milk may help fight against COVID-19 infection if baby is exposed.
- ✓ Considering the benefits of breastfeeding, a mother with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 should be encouraged and supported to continuing breastfeeding. The mother should wear a facemask (if available) or cloth face mask (see Box 1) when she is near her baby and perform hand hygiene before and after having close contact with the baby. She will also need to follow the necessary hygiene precautions (see Box 1) to prevent transmission.
- ✓ Infants born to mothers with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 should be fed according to standard infant feeding guidelines while applying the necessary hygiene precautions (see Box 1).
- ✓ Support mothers to practice skin-to-skin contact, kangaroo mother care and to remain together and to practice rooming-in throughout the day and night, especially immediately after birth and during establishment of breastfeeding, whether they or their infants have suspected/confirmed COVID-19.
- ✓ Provide breastfeeding counselling, basic psychosocial support, and practical feeding support as required to all pregnant women and mothers with infants and young children, whether they or their infants and young children have suspected/confirmed COVID-19.
- ✓ Babies should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life. From six-months-old, babies need a variety of additional foods that are hygienically prepared. Breastfeeding should continue until the child is at least two years old.
- ✓ Mother with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 or other health complications and too ill to continue direct breastfeeding should be encouraged and supported to express breast milk, and safely provide breast milk to the infant, while applying the necessary hygiene precautions (see Box 1).
- ✓ Mothers can express breast milk with hands, manual or electric breast pump. She should wash hands before expressing breast milk or touching any pump and ensure proper pump cleaning after each use. The expressed breast milk should be fed preferably to the infant using a cup with a wide mouth, or a cup and spoon with applying the necessary hygiene precautions (see Box 1).



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- ✓ Using a bottle is not advised as it requires sterilization prior to each use and makes it more difficult for the baby to return to the mother’s breast when she becomes well again.
- ✓ Artificial feeding carries some risks and should only be used as a last resort and following skilled guidance of a health or nutrition worker.
- ✓ Hygienic preparation of complementary foods for children aged six months and above is essential to reduce the risk of infection.
 - All utensils (bowls, spoons, cups, plates etc.) should be washed properly before and after eating.
 - It is recommended that infants and young children use their own bowls / plates / spoons / cups to avoid transmission.

BOX 1

Cloths face mask: Use of simple cloth face covering made at home from available items such as scarfs (Tarha) or Sudanese Tob.

Cloth face covering should:

- Fit snugly but comfortably against the side of the face
- Be secured with ties
- Include multiple layers of fabric
- Allow for breathing without restriction
- Be washed and dried regularly after use

Hygiene precautions for mothers with suspected/confirmed COVID-19

- Always wash hands with soap and water before and after contact with the infant.
- Routinely clean surfaces, which the mother has been in contact with, using soap and water.
- If the mother has respiratory symptoms, use of a face mask (if available) or cloth face mask when caring for the infant is recommended.
- Maintain physical distancing with other people and avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth.





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IYCF operational guidance in the Isolation Centre

- Allocate safe and **private childcare space** for breastfed children aged 0 <24 months with mothers suspected/confirmed COVID-19 with full IPC measures (see below) to minimize the risk, with the presence and support of skilled personnel.
- Ensure the presence of IYCF counselor /Nutritionist in the Isolation centre to:
 - Encourage/support mothers to practice skin-to-skin contact, kangaroo mother care and to remain together and to practice rooming-in throughout the day and night, ***especially immediately after birth and during establishment of breastfeeding***, whether they or their infants have suspected/confirmed COVID-19.
 - Provide practical feeding support and counselling according to recommended infant and young child feeding guidelines, and if required, timely link the mother with psychosocial support (if available).
 - Plan for complementary feeding for children aged 6 <24 months with applying necessary precautions for prevention of infection.
 - Where the mother is very sick and unable to breastfeed, support mothers to express breastmilk with demonstrating technique to the mothers, safe keeping, storage, administration including correct labelling of milk bottle.
Note: personal protective equipment should be provided to the IYCF counsellor/Nutritionist at the Centre.
- Ensure the presence of full-time children's nurse in the **private childcare space**, to take care of breastfed children aged 0 <24 months accompanying mothers with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 in the isolation centre.
- Ensure current COVID-19 ***infection prevention and control (IPC)*** practices are adhered to, including, but not limited to:
 - Regular and adequate cleaning of contact surfaces.
 - Proper hand hygiene (including assisting children with hand hygiene).
 - Encourage physical spacing between children.
 - Children must not share soothers, bottles, cups, facecloths, etc.
 - Multi-use utensils must be sanitized.
 - When holding infants, use blankets or cloths over childcare providers clothing and change the blankets or cloths between children.
 - Avoid getting close to faces of all children, where possible.
 - Check children's temperature and ask staff to check their own temperature daily before coming to the childcare space.
 - If a child begins to experience symptoms of COVID-19 while in the childcare space, he/she should immediately be separated from others in a supervised area.
- Supplies and equipment required to support IYCF in the isolation Centre:
 - Expressing kits for each mother in different sized (shields Small (21mm), Medium (24mm), Large (27mm) and Extra Large (30mm)). Cups/spoons/plates for child feeding, electric breast pumps, Infant milk warmers, refrigerator, breast milk substitute and disinfection solution and personal protective equipment (PPE).



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Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) programming in the health facility and community;

Continue promoting and disseminating the following messages:

1. Initiate breastfeeding within 1 hour of birth.
2. Exclusively breastfeed for the first 6 months.
3. Introduce age-appropriate, adequate, safe and properly fed complementary foods starting from 6 months up to 2 years of age.
4. Continue breastfeeding for up to 2 years of age or beyond.

Key Messages

- ✓ Promote, protect and support breastfeeding practices at the health facility and community level.
- ✓ Enable and support mothers to practice skin-to-skin contact, kangaroo mother care and to remain together and to practice rooming-in throughout the day and night, especially immediately after birth and during establishment of breastfeeding.
- ✓ Provide breastfeeding counselling, basic psychosocial support, and practical feeding support as required to all pregnant women and mothers with infants and young children.
- ✓ Babies should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life. From six months of age, babies need a variety of additional foods that are hygienically prepared. Breastfeeding should continue until the child is at least two years old.
- ✓ Ensure children 6 >24 months of age are receiving a diverse and healthy diet made of vegetables, meats, legumes and fruits (*refer to National complementary feeding guidelines*). Ensure children are well hydrated with water and non-sweetened fruit juices.
- ✓ If the mother or child displays any symptoms of cough, fever or difficulty breathing **IMMEDIATELY** alert the local health clinic and for further guidance call the national helpline or the state helpline on 9090.
- ✓ Post information, like posters and flyers that remind beneficiaries to practice hand washing in proper way, wash surfaces that have been in touch with, keep physical distance as well as recommended IYCF and nutrition messages.
- ✓ Caregivers and health workers should counsel/advise on the importance of healthy diets during complementary feeding and safe food preparation/ handling to reduce risk of transmission of COVID-19.



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- ✓ Before preparing or eating food, mothers/caregivers should ensure they implement the recommended hygiene practices such as hand washing with soap and regular cleaning and disinfecting of food preparation areas.
 - It is recommended that the mother/caregiver wash all the needed utensils (plate, cups, spoon, etc) and that
 - The child should use his/her own utensils to eat.
- ✓ Pregnant and lactating women need to drink whenever they are thirsty, avoid taking tea or coffee with meals and limit the amount of coffee they drink during pregnancy.

Mother support groups (MSG) IYCF operational guidance/ adjusted programme during context of COVID-19

- MSG sessions should be divided to small groups (5 mothers per session) and ensure physical distancing of 2 meters between mothers. In addition, reduce MSGs meeting frequency into one meeting per month.
- Lead mothers/trained mothers support their neighbors house to house adhering to the 2 meters distancing and all the IPC recommendations.
- Mothers trained and issued with MUAC tapes should regularly take MUAC measurements and self-refer in liaison with the Community Nutrition Volunteers taking all the needed precaution measures.
- **DO NOT** screen any child or pregnant and lactating women if they or anyone in their family has any symptoms (fever, fatigue, and dry cough) related to COVID-19.
- Advise mothers to send children to the nearest nutrition site if they are identified to be malnourished for further advice and management.
- Use lead mothers to deliver Sudan Ministry of Health approved key messages on preventing the spread of coronavirus, proper nutrition, practicing good hygiene and physical distancing.
- In case of complete lockdown mothers can provide counseling and share key messages through phone calls when needed. Moreover, these messages can be delivered via loudspeakers (including local mosques speakers) and local radios. Group gatherings and close contact is not encouraged.
- Coordinate with WASH sector to provide MSG members with hygiene supplies including soap and if possible, sanitizers. MSG members should wash hands regularly using water and soap.
- MSG members SHOULD NOT shake hands with anyone in the community. Although it may be culturally inappropriate, it helps reduce potential transmission of the coronavirus.
- Leverage social media, web and mass media platforms to provide needed information, clarify misinformation and misconceptions and support families by providing practical, feasible and context specific solutions for young children in the context of limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Make simple, practical and context specific information available using all available communication channels (digital, broadcast and social media) to the families on healthy feeding options for young children in the context of lockdowns and financial barriers.



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Health facility IYCF operational guidance/ adjusted programme during context of COVID-19

- Ensure proper hand washing for the lactating mother and caregivers during IYCF individual counseling.
- Ensure physical distancing of at least 2 meters between counselor and caregiver.
- Ensure adequate (open, well-ventilated) waiting space is available, implement physical distancing of at least 2 meters between each person.
- Minimize overcrowding by controlling the number of people allowed to enter the nutrition center premises. Do not allow more than 20 people to enter at a time.
- Nutrition staff should arrange follow up visits and ensure the centers will receive limited number of mothers.
- To ensure that nutrition centre staff do not expose themselves or community members to COVID-19, please wear face masks, rubber/plastic hand gloves and regularly and thoroughly wash hands with water and soap. If a hand sanitizer is available, it should also be used.
- Ensure the nutrition centre and surroundings are kept clean and all equipment and all contact surfaces are regularly and adequately disinfected.
- In case of complete lockdown IYCF counselling at health center should stop and counselling should be provided through phone calls where needed.





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Delivering Infant and Young Child Feeding services through various delivery platform

- ✓ Ensure the provision of nutritious food options or vitamins/ micronutrient powder accompanied with appropriate infant and young child feeding messages, counseling and support.
- ✓ Ensure the provision of essential food assistance to PLWs and children from 6 to 24 months (e.g. direct provision or cash transfer, food vouchers) to secure access to nutritious foods.
- ✓ Alignment and coordination in the mitigation plans across nutrition, health, food security and livelihood, agriculture, WASH, social protection and mental health and psychosocial support to focus on reaching infants and young children in the context of COVID-19.
- ✓ Actions through relevant systems (Nutrition, Food, WASH, and Social Protection) should prioritize the delivery of preventive services to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on young children's diets and wellbeing with strong linkages to early detection and treatment of child wasting.
- ✓ In health facilities, infants born to mothers with suspected/confirmed COVID-19 should be fed according to the recommended infant and young child feeding guidelines, while following necessary hygienic measures during feeding.





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