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Munahiliqiyikkut Inuuhiriknirmullu
Department of Health and Social Services
Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux

Fact Sheet #3:

Breastfeeding and the HTLV-1 Virus

Can I breastfeed safely?

If you are not infected with the HTLV-1 virus, it is safe to breastfeed your baby. The only way to make sure you are not infected is to have a blood test, because people infected with HTLV-1 may never feel sick from this virus.

If I am infected with HTLV-1, can I breastfeed?

The Department of Health and Social Services strongly recommends that if you are infected with HTLV-1, you should not breastfeed your baby. Breastfeeding can transmit the HTLV-1 virus from mother to baby.

What is the risk to my baby if I am infected with HTLV-1?

Even if you don't breastfeed, there is a small chance your baby may be infected during pregnancy. The HTLV-1 virus is able to infect your child in the womb. If you are HTLV-1 positive before your baby is born, the Department recommends that you test your child at 24 months of age for HTLV-1. This is the age at which the testing for HTLV-1 becomes accurate for babies.

Is it possible for HTLV-1 infected mothers to breastfeed safely?

No. There is always some risk of transmission. The longer you breastfeed, the greater the risk of transmitting the virus to your baby. If you are infected with HTLV-1 and decide to breastfeed regardless of the risk, we recommend that you at least limit breastfeeding to six months or less.

Prepared by:
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