

WHY BREASTFEEDING MATTERS

These brief education refresher sheets are designed for staff as a teaching aid during the coronavirus outbreak. Staff may include return to practice midwives or health visitors, students who have been fast-tracked to practice or health care assistants who have been redeployed into postnatal care within hospital or community settings. This information is an interim measure to help staff provide support and does not replace training. The links and information provided can be used by staff and shared with parents.

WHY BREASTFEEDING MATTERS: OVERVIEW

Studies over the past three decades show significant differences between the health of babies who are breastfed and those who are not. Results from longitudinal studies suggest that breastfeeding has long-lasting benefits which continue into adulthood. In addition, a mother will use her own immune system to protect herself from viruses and bacteria within her immediate environment. She then transfers this immunity via her lymph nodes into the milk she gives to her baby, thereby protecting her baby on a continuous basis.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT BREASTMILK?

Human breastmilk is a living fluid which not only provides the perfect nutrition for the baby, but also includes hundreds of constituents which help with the development of the baby's immune system and protects them from illnesses. To see some of the differences between human milk and infant formula, see the Unicef UK Baby Friendly Initiative [video on the constituents of breastmilk and formula](#).



USEFUL RESEARCH

- Funded by the Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust, the Lancet Series is the most extensive piece of research into the effects of breastfeeding ever undertaken: [unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/about/benefits-of-breastfeeding/](https://www.unicef.org.uk/babyfriendly/about/benefits-of-breastfeeding/)
- This research should put an end to any doubts about the impact of breastfeeding on the health and wellbeing of populations.

BREASTFEEDING AND HEALTH

Studies have demonstrated the costs of not breastfeeding in both human and economic terms. The diagram below shows just some of the human costs.



BABY

In the baby, breastfeeding reduces the risk of infections (gastro, respiratory, urinary, ear, necrotising enterocolitis), allergies, sudden infant death syndrome, insulin-dependent diabetes and childhood leukaemia.



MOTHER

In the mother, breastfeeding reduces the risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer and osteoporosis.



LONGER TERM

In both mother and baby and in the wider population in the longer term, breastfeeding reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and obesity.