

The background is a solid light orange color. Five line-art illustrations of babies are scattered around a central white, irregularly shaped bubble. One baby is at the top, lying on its back with arms outstretched. Another is at the top left, sitting up and looking towards the center. A third is on the right, lying on its side with legs bent. A fourth is at the bottom left, lying on its back looking up. The fifth is at the bottom right, sitting up and looking up. The central bubble contains the text 'Is Formula Good for My Baby?' in a bold, teal-colored font.

# **Is Formula Good for My Baby?**

**3**

Is formula good  
for my baby?

**7**

Recommendations for  
feeding your baby

**13**

Coping with your  
feelings

**19**

Questions  
about the law

**21**

Getting help

**22**

Free formula  
programs

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Information in this brochure is not  
medical or legal advice. Decisions  
about treatment should always be  
made with the advice of a doctor who  
knows about HIV. For legal advice, consult  
a lawyer. Medical treatment changes, as  
does the law, so talk to a professional to get  
the latest information. The opinions in this  
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# Is formula good for my baby?

Congratulations! Having  
a baby is wonderful and  
exciting—and sometimes  
a little worrying—for many  
new mothers. Making sure  
their baby gets the right  
food is usually a priority.  
Practices differ around the  
world and even across the  
country. Breastfeeding is one  
option. However, many women  
feed formula to their baby.

\* While we have written this piece to speak to mothers who  
identify as women, we acknowledge that this information  
may also apply to trans men who have had children.



There are different reasons for formula feeding. Sometimes it is a choice. Sometimes it is for medical

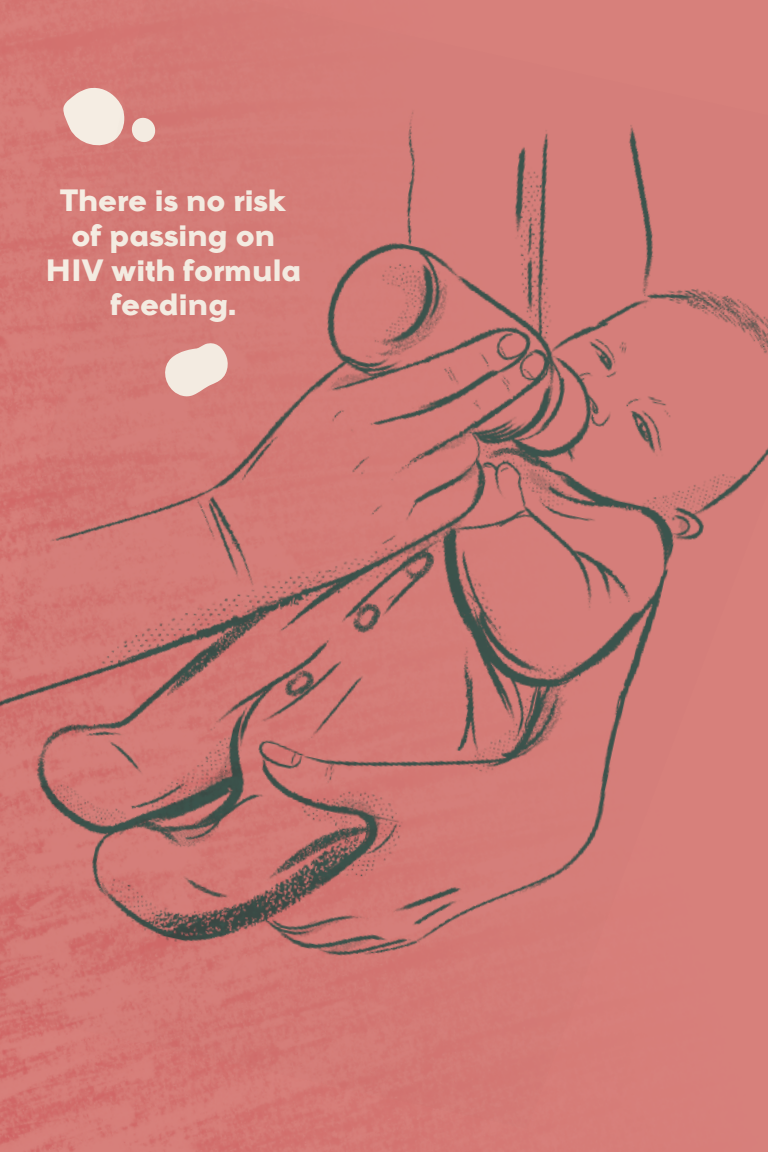
reasons. Formula feeding is the best option for mothers who take certain medications or who have certain medical conditions. For example, formula feeding is one step a mother with HIV can take to ensure her baby stays HIV negative.

Women may have different feelings about formula feeding. Some women are comfortable with it. Some women, however, feel that they live in a culture that sees formula feeding as less healthy than breast-feeding. This can raise a lot of emotions.

It is important to know that **formula provides the nutrition babies need to grow up healthy and strong.** And if you are a woman living with HIV and are pregnant or have a young baby, this booklet has important information about how to keep your baby healthy.

**Formula provides the nutrition babies need to grow up healthy and strong.**



A black and white line drawing of a baby lying down, being fed with a bottle. The baby is wearing a onesie and has its legs bent. The bottle is held by a hand, and the baby is looking up at it. The background is a solid red color.

There is no risk  
of passing on  
HIV with formula  
feeding.

## Recommendations for feeding your baby

If you have HIV, you may hear a lot of different things about how to feed your baby. Part of the reason you might hear different things is that **the feeding recommendations in Canada are not the same as the recommendations in some other countries.** This is what is recommended for mothers living with HIV in Canada:

- **Feed your baby formula.** There is **no risk of HIV transmission** to your baby after birth with formula feeding. Several free formula programs exist across Canada. These are listed at the end.
- **Do not breastfeed your baby.** HIV can be passed from an HIV-positive mother to her baby through breast milk. The risk is lower when the mother's viral load is undetectable, but the risk still exists.

You may have heard that in lower-income countries mothers are advised to take anti-HIV medications

and to breastfeed. In these countries, access to clean water and/or affordable formula is not always possible, so the risk of a baby getting very sick with malnutrition or infections (especially diarrhea and pneumonia) from formula feeding is higher than the risk of HIV. Breastfeeding may be the safest option in these countries, even when there is still a small risk of passing on HIV.

Most people in Canada have clean drinking water and can store formula made with water in the

fridge or they can get pre-mixed formula that does not need water. This is why formula feeding is recommended. If you cannot get



clean water or pre-mixed formula, talk to a trusted healthcare worker or support worker to plan for a supply of formula before your baby is born.

- **Do not breastfeed your baby sometimes and other times feed your baby formula or any other breast milk substitute** (like cow's milk)—this is called mixed feeding. Studies show that mixed feeding carries the highest chance of your baby getting HIV.
- **Do not chew food in your mouth before you feed it to your baby.** If your blood gets in the food, HIV could be passed on to your baby.
- **Be open with your HIV care provider and your baby's care providers about how and what you are feeding your baby.** This allows the medical team to give your baby the best care because they have all of the information.

**Do not breastfeed your baby. Do not breastfeed your baby sometimes and other times feed your baby formula.**

## How are recommendations made in Canada?

The recommendations in Canada for mothers living with HIV are based on research studies.

- Babies have become HIV positive from breast milk even when the mother takes her anti-HIV medications and has a low viral load.
- Experts think that HIV can “hide” in breast milk. (They say that breast milk is an HIV reservoir.) When HIV is hiding, anti-HIV medications cannot find it and treat it. So even when a person’s viral load is undetectable in the blood, HIV can still be in breast milk and it can be passed on to the baby during breastfeeding.
- When mothers are on HIV treatment, anti-HIV medications can be present in breast milk. We do not know a lot

**Experts think HIV can hide in breast milk, even when the mother is taking anti-HIV medications.**



about how anti-HIV medications that come through breast milk might impact a baby over time. Some studies show that there are no known concerns. Other studies have shown that for babies who do become HIV positive through breast milk, their HIV might not respond to some anti-HIV medications because of drug resistance. When HIV becomes resistant to anti-HIV medications, those medications will no longer work and the disease can be harder to treat. We need to learn more about this topic.

Even though you may hear that there are benefits to breastfeeding, **formula feeding is the safest feeding option for babies born to mothers living with HIV in Canada.**





**It's normal to have different feelings about the right way to feed your baby. Talk to someone you trust.**

## Coping with your feelings

Having a new baby is often a happy time. It can be stressful too. You may have different feelings about many things, including the right way to feed your baby. This is normal. We recommend speaking to a trusted healthcare professional, support worker or other mothers living with HIV to discuss how to manage all of these feelings. Here are some common feelings about feeding your baby and ideas about what you can do:

- Have you heard the saying “breast is best” or people criticizing mothers who do not breastfeed? Hearing these types of comments can hurt. They do not take into account the many mothers like you who do not breastfeed. Besides HIV, there are other reasons why breastfeeding may not be the best or safest option for a baby. Sometimes it helps to know that there are many other mothers out there who do not breastfeed their babies.
- You might worry about the impact of formula feeding on your baby's immune system because

your baby is missing breast milk. Don't worry; your baby's immune system will build over time, with or without breastfeeding.

- Some mothers worry about not bonding with their baby because they are not breastfeeding. You can bond with your baby in many other ways. Some ways to bond with your baby include hugging or snuggling your baby, singing to your baby and

holding your baby against your bare skin. Responding to your baby's needs is also a form of bonding. Every interaction between you and your baby is an opportunity to bond.

- Not breastfeeding can bring up feelings of sadness because you might worry that feeding your baby formula is not as healthy as

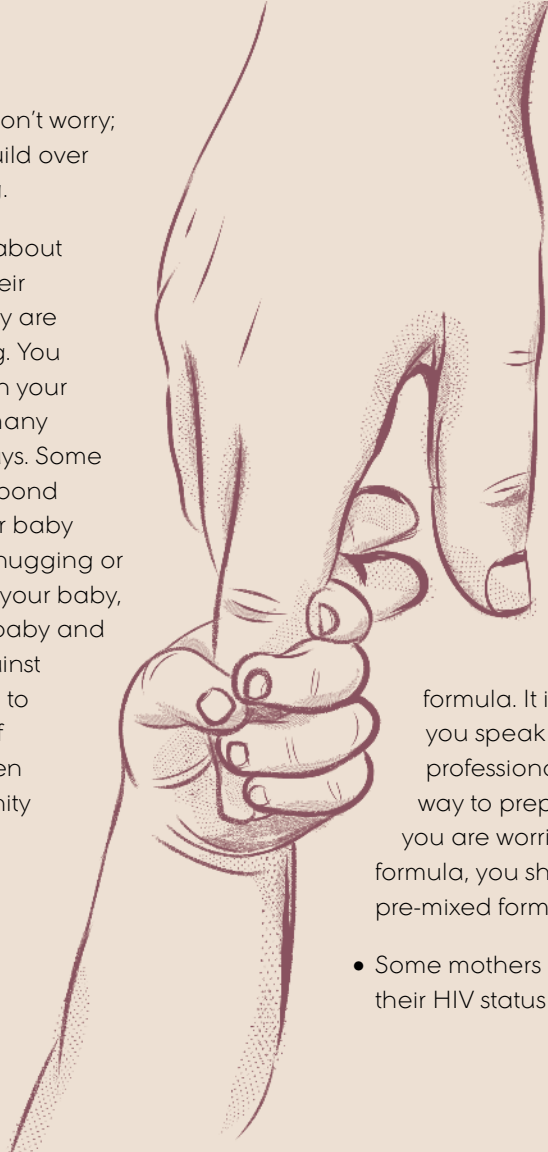
breastfeeding. Others describe a feeling of loss or grief. If you have these feelings, talk about them with someone you trust. Remember that formula is a healthy substitute for breast milk. Infant formula is made to meet the needs of your baby.

- Before your baby is born, it is a good idea to get advice on breast health so you know what to do when your breast milk starts to come in and how to stop the breast milk after your baby is born. You can also ask about preparing

formula. It is recommended that you speak to a health care professional about the safest way to prepare formula. If you are worried about mixing formula, you should ask about pre-mixed formula.

- Some mothers are open about their HIV status and are comfortable

**You can bond with your baby in many ways.**





explaining why they are formula feeding. Some other mothers worry that by feeding their baby formula others will know that they have HIV. This leads to some mothers avoiding other people sometimes. It is true that friends and family may ask you why you are not breastfeeding. It can help to have something to tell these people if you're not comfortable talking about your HIV status. "Reasons for formula feeding" (on the right) lists some reasons why women do not breastfeed.

**People might say insensitive things. You cannot prevent this, but being prepared for it can help you manage your reaction.**

It may help to discuss how to talk to people about this issue with a trusted healthcare professional, support worker or another mother living with HIV. We recommend that you give the same reason to everyone so there is no confusion for you or them. It is important that you are comfortable with what you decide to tell others.

- People might say insensitive things to you about infant feeding. Even trained professionals might forget why you are formula feeding. While there is no way to prevent this from happening, being prepared can sometimes help you manage your feelings in the moment.

## Reasons for formula feeding

I decided to bottlefeed because it allows other people to take part in feeding and bonding with my baby.

My baby didn't latch well.


I wasn't making enough milk for my baby's needs.

My doctor advised me to formula feed because the baby wasn't gaining weight.

I decided not to breastfeed. I prefer bottle feeding.

I needed to take a medication after delivery that made it not safe for my baby to breastfeed.

My baby doesn't breastfeed well.

A stylized illustration in teal and orange tones shows a mother from the side, holding her baby. The mother is looking down at the baby, and the baby is looking up at the mother. The background is a textured orange color with some white spots.

**If you follow the recommendation to feed your baby formula, there is no reason for the law to get involved.**

## Questions about the law

Most HIV-positive mothers never deal with the legal system, but you may have questions. The most important thing to know is that if you follow the recommendation to feed your baby formula, there is no reason for the law to get involved. Other than this, **the laws are not always clear.** According to legal experts in Canada, this is what we do know:

- If a mother living with HIV in Canada chooses to breastfeed her baby, two things that could happen are:
  1. Child protection services may get involved, or
  2. The mother may be charged with a crime. This is because breastfeeding is not recommended and may put her baby's health at risk.
- If a mother living with HIV in Canada is breastfeeding her baby and she tells someone or someone finds out, experts do not recommend that the mother be automatically reported to child protection services or police. Each case should be handled based on the facts of the situation. The reason why the mother chose to breastfeed needs to be identified.

The law may change. For the most up-to-date information, contact the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network at [www.aidslaw.ca](http://www.aidslaw.ca)



## Getting help

Infant feeding resources are available to mothers living with HIV in Canada. You may also have other questions. It is best to speak to your healthcare professional, support worker or someone at your local community health organization about the services and supports that are available to you.

Your local community health organization may offer services specifically for people living with HIV. Some organizations are dedicated to serving people with HIV. Some organizations may have programs and support groups specifically for women and mothers living with HIV. This might be an opportunity to talk with other mothers about their feelings and experiences with infant feeding. If no peer support program is available in your community, consider working with your local organization to start one.

You can find a community health organization in your area by visiting [www.HIV411.ca](http://www.HIV411.ca) or by calling CATIE at 1-800-263-1638



## Free formula programs

The following list contains contact details for free formula programs in Canada for mothers living with HIV. You can also contact your service provider, support worker or local community health organization for up-to-date information about free formula programs.

### British Columbia

**Oak Tree Clinic at  
BC Women's Hospital  
and Health Centre**  
604-875-2212

### Alberta

**Northern Alberta Program  
at the University of Alberta**  
780-407-1852

**Northern Alberta Program  
at Royal Alexandra  
Satellite Clinic**  
780-735-4811

**Southern Alberta HIV  
Program at the  
Sheldon M. Chumir  
Health Centre**  
403-955-6399

### Saskatchewan

**Saskatchewan  
Infant Formula Program**  
contact@HIVPLT.ca

### Manitoba

**Nine Circles Community  
Health Centre: Winnipeg  
Regional Health Authority**  
204-940-6000

### Ontario

**The Teresa Group  
Provincial Baby Formula  
Program**  
416-596-7703

### Other provinces and territories

At the time of publication, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador did not offer a free formula program. Information was not available for Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut or Prince Edward Island. Please contact your service provider for the most up-to-date information.



The Teresa Group has been providing support to children and families infected and affected by HIV and AIDS since 1990. Our practical assistance programs seek to ease the burden that economic disadvantage can place on families, while our emotional support programs aim to provide a continuum of care, therapeutic intervention and education for families from the prenatal stage up until children reach the age of eighteen.

**www.teresagroup.ca**  
**416-596-7703**



CATIE is Canada's source for HIV and hepatitis C information. We connect people living with HIV or hepatitis C, at-risk communities, healthcare providers and community organizations with the knowledge, resources and expertise to reduce transmission and improve quality of life.

**www.catie.ca**  
**1-800-263-1638**

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