



HIV and Breastfeeding: Let me Google that for you...



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About 2,900 searches per month (of which 320 are from the UK)

### Introduction

BHIVA's position statement advises complete avoidance of breastfeeding (BrF)<sup>1</sup>. However, doctors are not people's only source of health information. On average "HIV breastfeeding" is 'Googled' 2900 times a month with 320 of these searches originating from the UK.

Not all medical information found on the web is accurate. A study looking at advice on infant sleeping positions found that only 43.5% of websites were in line with current best practice<sup>2</sup>. Hence we investigated the messages people receive when Googling HIV and breastfeeding.

### Methods

10 phrases related to HIV and breastfeeding were Googled (13/12/2012).

|                                |                                       |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| HIV breastfeeding              | Should HIV mothers breastfeed         |
| Breastfeeding and HIV          | I am HIV positive should I breastfeed |
| HIV breast milk                | I am HIV positive can I breastfeed    |
| HIV breastfeeding mothers      | HIV and breastfeeding is it safe      |
| HIV breastfeeding transmission | HIV positive want to breastfeed       |

Worldwide and UK-only searches were carried out. For each search the first page of links generated was scrutinised and the 10 most frequently occurring links from both the UK and worldwide searches were followed. As one website appeared in both top tens, a total of 19 links were further investigated.

The content of each site was reviewed focusing on its initial and overall message. This evaluation was limited to the one page each link led to (or the PDF it linked to) and not the website as a whole.

### Results

19 sites were reviewed, of which 7 were news articles, 8 were sites giving advice and 4 linked to policy documents. The initial 'headline' message of 4/19 web pages was 'pro' breastfeeding with no distinction between resource limited (RL) and resource rich (RR) areas. Only 7/19 had a clear distinction between RL and RR settings.

3 sites had misleading messages, e.g. "a mother's breast milk can stop a baby contracting HIV" and "this study provides significant insight into the amazing ability of breast milk to destroy HIV and prevent potential transmission".

### Conclusions

It is concerning that the initial 'headline' message of 4/19 web pages was 'pro' breastfeeding with no distinction between RL and RR areas. Women in the UK can easily access information not relevant to their circumstances and this information varies from being high quality and well referenced, to misleading and dangerous.

This highlights the importance of supplying easily accessible and accurate information to support women's decision making. Those who supply such information can increase their websites' prominence in search engine results by incorporating commonly searched for phrases in the headings and main text of their websites (known as Search Engine Optimisation). As in other areas of medical care, women living with HIV should be advised to proceed with caution when using the internet to inform their decision making.

| Article title  | www search | UK search | No. of times link appears in results | Immediate message | Overall impression   | Misleading information? | Distinguish resource RL and RR | Pro BF resource rich | Pro BF resource limited |
|--|------------|-----------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|--|-------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| BBC News/Health/Breastfeeding alone cuts HIV risk                        | ✓          | ✓         | 8                                    | Pro BrF           | Pro exclusive Brf in RL  | No                      | Yes                            |                      | ✓                       |
| HIV and Breastfeeding - AVERT  | ✓          |           | 8                                    | Equivocal         | Anti BrF RR, Pro exclusive Brf RL                                | No                      | Yes                            |                      | ✓                       |
| HIV/AIDS and Infant feeding - Unicef                                     | ✓          |           | 6                                    | Equivocal         | Pro exclusive Brf RL   | No                      | No                             |                      |                         |
| Breastmilk kills HIV and blocks its oral transmission in humanized...    | ✓          |           | 5                                    | Pro BrF           | Important research finding                                       | Yes                     | No                             | ✓                    | ✓                       |
| WHO/Breast is always best even for HIV positive mothers                  | ✓          |           | 5                                    | Pro Brf           | Pro exclusive Brf  | Yes                     | No                             |                      | ✓                       |
| HIV transmission through breastfeeding: a review of...UNFPA              | ✓          |           | 5                                    | Equivocal         | Large policy document  | No                      | Yes                            |                      | ✓                       |
| Can I Breastfeed my Baby if I'm Positive?                                | ✓          |           | 4                                    | Equivocal         | Exclusive breast or exclusive formula depending on circumstances | No                      | No                             |                      | ✓                       |
| DoctorSindi - Qoohme   | ✓          |           | 3                                    | Equivocal         | Dynamic Q&A forum, does advise against mixed feeding             | No                      | No                             |                      | ✓                       |
| Breastfeeding Now safer for Infants of HIV-Infected Mothers              | ✓          |           | 3                                    | Pro Brf           | Infant prophylaxis whilst breastfeeding                          | No                      | No                             |                      | ✓                       |
| Breastfeeding: Diseases and Conditions: HIV and AIDS/DNPAO               | ✓          |           | 3                                    | Equivocal         | No breast feeding  | No                      | No                             |                      |                         |
| WHO/Transmission through breastfeeding                                   | ✓          |           | 3                                    | Equivocal         | Large policy document  | No                      | No                             |                      | ✓                       |
| DNA sequencing confirms HIV transmission through surrogate breastfeeding |            | ✓         | 5                                    | Against           | Maternal testing and infant prophylaxis                          | No                      | No                             |                      | ✓                       |
| Having children when you are HIV positive                                |            | ✓         | 5                                    | Equivocal         | Pro formula  | No                      | No                             |                      |                         |
| HIV and infant feeding-Department of Health                              |            | ✓         | 3                                    | Equivocal         | No breast feeding  | No                      | Yes                            |                      | ✓                       |
| HIV and breastfeeding in Africa:balancing the risks                      |            | ✓         | 3                                    | Equivocal         | Exclusively aimed at healthcare professionals                    | No                      | Yes                            |                      | ✓                       |
| A mother's breast milk can stop a baby contracting HIV, study finds      |            | ✓         | 2                                    | Pro BrF           | Important research but still no breastfeeding                    | Headline only           | No                             | ✓                    | ✓                       |
| HIV and Breastfeeding -Safety and Advice -SHE Programme                  |            | ✓         | 2                                    | Equivocal         | No breastfeeding   | No                      | Yes                            |                      |                         |
| Breastfeeding and HIV-LabSpace-the Open University                       |            | ✓         | 2                                    | Equivocal         | Exclusive formula if possible otherwise                          | No                      | No                             |                      | ✓                       |
| Breast-feeding/Health/Patient.co.uk                                      |            | ✓         | 2                                    | Equivocal         | Exclusive formula RR, Exclusive Brf RL                           | No                      | Yes                            |                      | ✓                       |

**Breast milk kills HIV and blocks its oral transmission in humanized mouse**

More than 15 percent of new HIV infections occur in children. Without treatment, only 65 percent of HIV-infected children will live until their first birthday, and fewer than half will make it to the age of two...

**A mother's breast milk can stop a baby contracting HIV, study finds**

Breast milk can kill the HIV virus and prevent it from being passed on, a study has found. Despite breastfeeding being the source of a small number of infections, most breastfed infants do not contract HIV...

1. British HIV Association and Children's HIV Association Position Statement On Infant Feeding in the UK, <http://www.bhiva.org/documents/Publications/InfantFeeding10.pdf> 2. Safe infant sleep recommendations on the internet: Let's Google it, Chung et al, J Pediatr. 2012 Dec; 161(6): 1080-4.