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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Breastfeeding Recommended to Protect Infants During Swine Flu Outbreak

Washington, DC--As the nation monitors the intensifying "swine flu" outbreak, the United States Breastfeeding Committee (USBC) recommends breastfeeding as a critical strategy to prevent infection. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued [updated guidance today on H1N1 \(swine\) flu considerations for pregnancy and breastfeeding](#), stating that: "Infants who are not breastfeeding are particularly vulnerable to infection and hospitalization for severe respiratory illness. Women who deliver should be encouraged to initiate breastfeeding early and feed frequently."

Medical experts agree with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in recommending exclusive breastfeeding for six months and continued breastfeeding for the first year of life and beyond. USBC Chair Joan Younger Meek, MD, MS, RD, FAAP, FABM, IBCLC, affirms the importance of breastfeeding in emergency situations: "Research clearly shows that breastfeeding provides a safe, reliable food source, full of disease-fighting cells and antibodies that help protect infants from germs and illnesses. Mothers exposed to influenza produce specific protection for their infants and transmit this through their breast milk. Infant formula does not provide these specific infection fighting properties. Unnecessary formula supplementation should be eliminated so the infant can receive as much benefit as possible from maternal protective antibodies and other immune protective factors."

Women can continue to breastfeed while receiving antiviral medications. CDC guidance recommends that if a woman is ill, she should continue breastfeeding and increase feeding frequency. If the mother or infant is too ill to breastfeed directly at the breast, the mother should be encouraged to pump and feed her breast milk to her infant. In certain situations, infants may be able to use donor human milk from a milk bank certified by the [Human Milk Banking Association of North America](#).

The CDC reports that although the risk of H1N1 (swine) flu transmission through breast milk is unknown, reports of seasonal flu being transmitted through breast milk are rare. In addition, by the time a mother begins showing symptoms of the flu, her infant has already been exposed. The mother's milk can provide additional protection for the infant from complications of the flu, such as severe respiratory symptoms, diarrhea, other gastrointestinal infections, and dehydration.

In addition to continued breastfeeding, parents and caretakers can help protect their infant from the spread of germs when they:

- Wash adults' and infants' hands frequently with soap and water, especially after infants place their hands in their mouths.

- Keep infants and mothers as close together as possible and encourage early and frequent skin-to-skin contact between mothers and their infants.
- Limit sharing of toys and other items that have been in infants' mouths, and wash thoroughly with soap and water any items that have been in infants' mouths.
- Keep pacifiers (including the pacifier ring/handle) and other items out of adults' or other infants' mouths before giving them to the infant.
- Cover the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.

For more information about H1N1 (swine) flu, visit the [CDC's H1N1 Flu Web site](#). For more information about breastfeeding, visit [The National Women's Health Information Center](#). Physicians and other health care providers can offer assistance and answer questions about breastfeeding, and knowledgeable breastfeeding support personnel can be located through the [International Lactation Consultant Association](#), the [USDA Food and Nutrition Service Women, Infants and Children \(WIC\) Program](#), and [La Leche League International](#).

The USBC is an organization of organizations. Opinions expressed by USBC are not necessarily the position of all member organizations and opinions expressed by USBC member organization representatives are not necessarily the position of USBC.

United States Breastfeeding Committee (USBC)

The United States Breastfeeding Committee (USBC) is an independent nonprofit coalition of 41 nationally influential professional, educational, and governmental organizations. Representing over half a million concerned professionals and the families they serve, USBC and its member organizations share a common mission to improve the Nation's health by working collaboratively to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding. For more information about USBC, visit www.usbreastfeeding.org.

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