# American Academy of Pediatrics Updates Policy to Allow HIV-Positive Individuals to Breastfeed with Viral Suppression



The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) announced a significant policy update allowing individuals with HIV to breastfeed their infants, provided they are on medications that effectively suppress the virus. This move reverses decades-old recommendations dating back to the early years of the HIV epidemic in the 1980s.

The AAP's new position is supported by findings that antiretroviral therapy (ART) can reduce the risk of HIV transmission through breast milk to less than 1%. Dr. Lisa Abuogi, a pediatric HIV expert at the University of Colorado and lead author of the report, highlighted the effectiveness of current medications, advocating for shared decision-making between healthcare providers and patients.

This policy change follows similar updates by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which also adjusted their recommendations in favor of providing counseling and support for breastfeeding among individuals with HIV who maintain viral suppression.

Historically, switching between breastfeeding and formula feeding was discouraged due to the elevated risk of HIV transmission. Research shows that exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months is safer and avoids disruptions to an infant’s gut, which can increase infection risks.

The new guidance aims to present more informed choices for the estimated 5,000 women with HIV who give birth annually in the U.S. Prior to the advent of widely accessible ART, approximately 30% of HIV transmissions from mother to infant occurred during breastfeeding, a figure that has dramatically reduced with current medical practices.

Worldwide, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended since 2010 that women with HIV in developing countries breastfeed with access to ART, balancing the risks of HIV transmission with those of malnutrition and other infant illnesses in regions lacking safe formula alternatives.

The updated AAP report is intended to help pediatricians, nurses, and lactation specialists better support informed decisions by families affected by HIV, acknowledging the benefits of breastfeeding and the significant advancements in HIV treatment.