

[COVID Information Commons \(CIC\) Research Lightning Talk](#)

[Transcript of a Presentation by Janet Williams \(University of Idaho\), December 2020](#)



Title: Collaborative Research: COVID-19, human milk and infant feeding

[Janet Williams CIC Database Profile](#)

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Transcript

Janet Williams:

*Slide 1*

So, thank you for the introduction and thank you to the organizers for allowing me the opportunity to present about our study today which was funded by the NSF RAPID collaborative research program. The title of my talk is “COVID-19, Human Milk, and Infant Feeding”.

*Slide 2*

I'm presenting today on behalf of a wonderful group of collaborators who I have the honor and privilege to work with. I have collaborators here at the University of Idaho, and I believe Dr. Ryan Pace is on the call as well, at Washington State University, University of Washington, and Tulane University.

*Slide 3*

The goals for our study was to determine whether or not- if human milk is a potential mode of transmission for the SARS-CoV-2 virus and also to examine antibody kinetics in breastfeeding and non-breastfeeding women and their infants.

#### *Slide 4*

So, to take a step backwards, why is this study important? Well we knew back the start of the pandemic that some viruses like HIV can be vertically transmitted or transmitted via human milk. And so, at the start of it if there was a lot of uncertainty and so the initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic was that at times and in several locations, women who were diagnosed with COVID-19 were separated from their infants and also discouraged from breastfeeding.

#### *Slide 5*

But this has important ramifications as you might imagine, because human milk not only contains important nutrients and bioactive factors that are important for the growth and development of infants, but also it contains important immune factors that help protect from disease. And so research needed to be done to determine what were the potential risks and benefits of breastfeeding?

#### *Slide 6*

So, we designed a study in which we recruited 25 breastfeeding dyads, or mother infant pairs, and also, we were hoping to recruit 25 formula feeding dyads as well. Mothers- we recruited mothers who were diagnosed within seven days of having their COVID diagnosis. We've met our target for the 25 breastfeeding dyads, but unfortunately, we were not able to do- we have not met our target for the formula feeding dyads, and so we have pivoted as we often have to do in these COVID times and so we are now recruiting 25 breastfeeding dyads with mothers who are healthy and who have not been sick. From these moms and from their infants, we are collecting milk, breast swabs, blood spots, stool samples that are collected seven times over two months, as well as information about maternal and infant health, infant feeding practices and related behaviors.

#### *Slide 7*

Our ongoing and planned analyses for these samples are that we will be examining the milk, the breast swabs, and the stool for presence of the SARS-CoV-2 RNA as well as looking at antibodies in both the milk and the blood and then relating this with the information that we're also collecting to infant feeding mode as well as maternal COVID status. These analyses are ongoing as well as our recruitment is ongoing but to present just a little bit of the preliminary data or some of our preliminary findings, I can share with you that from the milk samples we have not detected any SARS-CoV-2 RNA and this is consistent with previous studies that have now since come out to show that milk does not appear to be a vehicle for the transmission of the virus. This is good news for moms and infants and so the CDC and the World Health Organization has changed their recommendations such that it is now recommended that moms and infants should or that mom should continue to breastfeed even if mom is COVID positive but using appropriate preventatives like washing hands and wearing masks.

*Slide 8*

So, I appreciate your time and once again on behalf of all my collaborators I thank you for your attention and I thank you to NSF for providing the funding for this information and I- if you have any questions, I have my email here as well as emails for the four lead PIs at each one of the institutions. Thank you.