is no benefit to delaying breastfeeding after the mother is no longer contagious. For example, if the mother breaks out with the chickenpox rash four days before birth, the baby and mother can be reunited and the baby can breastfeed on his second day with no chance of contagion if the mother’s lesions have crusted.

If the baby’s siblings have chickenpox when the baby is born, the mother should keep the siblings away from the baby. If the mother has previously had chickenpox herself, the risk of the newborn catching chickenpox is greatly reduced.

**Cholera and Typhoid Fever**

Cholera is caused by bacteria that damage the intestinal lining and cause severe diarrhea and vomiting. The bacteria is spread through polluted water or raw fruits and vegetables in places where sanitation and hygiene are poor. Typhoid fever is an infectious disease spread under unsanitary conditions through contaminated food, drink, or water, but it can also be spread from person to person.

Breastfeeding protects a baby from cholera in two ways. First, if the mother has been exposed to cholera, her breastfed baby will receive protection from the symptoms of cholera through her milk, although the Vibrio cholerae bacteria may be found in the exposed baby’s system. Second, if the baby is exclusively breastfeeding he will not ingest the polluted water or foods or use feeding implements that have been washed in unclean water, so it is unlikely the baby will contract the disease.

Typhoid fever is also spread in part through unsanitary conditions; so the exclusively breastfed baby would avoid contact with the bacteria through food, drink, or feeding implements. The antibodies in human milk would also offer some protection from diarrhea.

There is no evidence that cholera or typhoid fever can be transmitted through breastfeeding (Lawrence and Lawrence, p. 882).

Although the breastfeeding mother will not infect her baby, during the acute phase of the illness she may not have the physical strength to care for her baby.

A mother who is too ill to breastfeed on her own will need help in either putting her baby to breast or regularly expressing her milk, so that she does not become engorged or develop mastitis. If her milk is expressed, it could be given to her baby.

**Cold, Flu, or Mild Infections**

When the mother is exposed to an illness, such as a cold or the flu, her body very quickly begins producing specific antibodies that protect her breastfeeding baby. By the time the mother begins to feel sick, her baby has already been exposed to her illness. Continuing to breastfeed will help the baby fend off the mother’s illness. And if he does get sick, the breastfeeding baby almost always has a milder case because of the antibodies he receives from his mother’s milk.

Many mothers find it easy to conserve their strength by tucking the baby into bed with them and breastfeeding lying down when the baby gets hungry. For the sick mother who has to care for her baby alone, breastfeeding makes this easier. She does not have to go out and buy formula or get up and prepare bottles. If the mother has household help, encourage her to breastfeed the baby in bed and then ask her helper to change and entertain the baby while she rests.