

Dear Chipo

Well done for being brave enough to have an HIV test. Now you can do many things to care for yourself and the baby you are carrying. Most babies born to HIV positive mothers will not get HIV. Only three out of every ten babies get the virus. This happens while the baby is in the womb, during childbirth or through breastfeeding. Fortunately, there are a number of ways to lower the risk.

Firstly, clinics and hospitals in Zimbabwe offer a drug called Nevirapine free to HIV positive pregnant women. This drug makes it harder for HIV to infect the baby during childbirth and protects the baby in the first three days. Ask the clinic about their Prevention of Parent to Child Transmission (PPTCT) programme. Also, either feed your baby on milk formula or find out everything about how to breastfeed safely by feeding your baby on breastmilk only (absolutely nothing else, not even water) for the first six months. Then at six months, you must stop breastfeeding completely and start the baby on other foods.

Also help your baby by looking after yourself as well as you can – ask at the clinic for advice. The clinic will also be able to tell you when your baby should be tested for HIV and how best to keep her healthy.

Good luck with motherhood!

Auntie Stella

ACTION POINTS

- **ROLEPLAY:** An HIV positive mother has decided to breastfeed her baby for the first six months and she now has to tell her husband's mother that she cannot give the child any other food or drink.

Do you think this is a problem in real life? What can be done about it?
- Make a list of all the advantages and disadvantages of breastfeeding if the mother is HIV positive. Make a similar list for giving the baby milk formula. What would you do if you were in this situation?
- What do you think it is like to be an HIV positive mother with a sick baby? Find out about any programmes in your community to help women in this situation. Do they need more help? What can you do?
- See card 26 for more information on how to live positively.

