

Breastfeeding in neonates during the Coronavirus Disease 2019 pandemic in China: a cross-sectional survey

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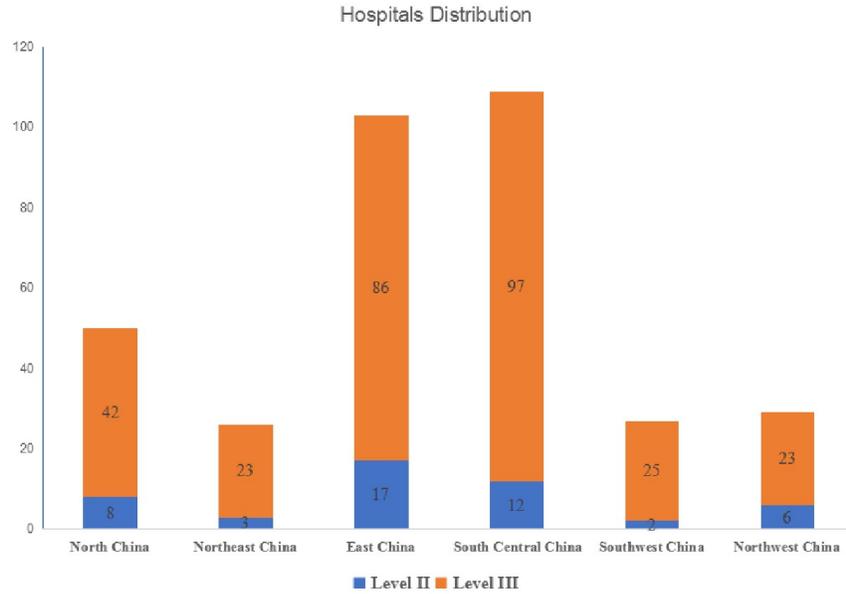
June 5, 2020

Abstract

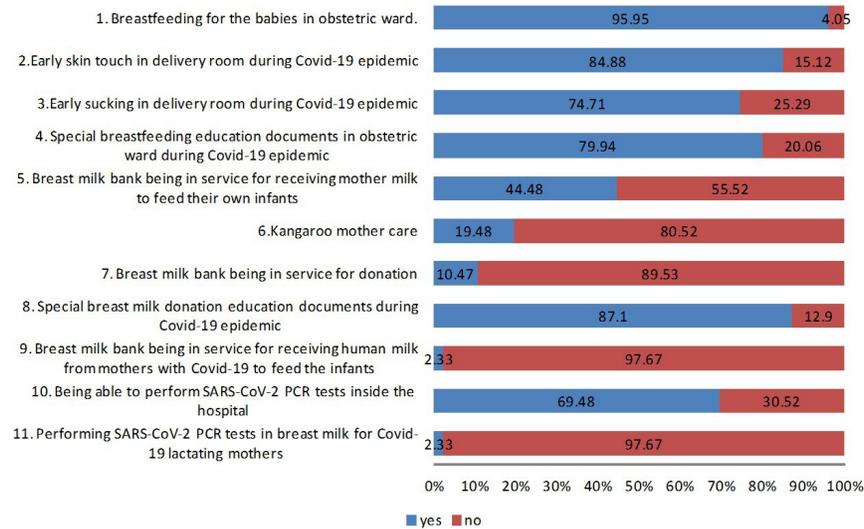
Abstract Objective: To elucidate the current situation of breastfeeding in neonates in China and to investigate whether SARS-CoV-2 is transmitted through the mother's milk. **Design:** A nationwide cross-sectional survey **Setting:** Three hundred and forty-four member hospitals of the Chinese Neonatologist Association network from 31 provinces in China. **Sample:** Nine hundred and fourteen neonatologists **Main outcome measures:** These included (1) breastfeeding practices in the obstetrics ward; (2) breastfeeding implementation for neonates admitted to neonatal intensive care unit (NICU); (3) presence of SARS-CoV-2 in the breast milk of COVID-19 positive mothers based on the real-time reverse transcriptase-polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCT) test results. **Results:** Breastfeeding was undermined during the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the 344 hospitals, 153 (44.48%) centers received breast milk from milk banks to feed babies in NICU. Eight (2.33%) Level III centers performed SARS-CoV-2 PCR tests on breast milk from 15 mothers with COVID-19 and found no SARS-CoV-2 RNA presence in breast milk. Moreover, none of the mothers engaged in breastfeeding. Further, only 52 (5.69%) neonatologists supported breastfeeding in mothers with COVID-19. **Conclusions:** Based on the available evidence, the benefits of breastfeeding for both infants and mothers outweigh the potential risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission through breast milk. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, medical staff should encourage breastfeeding, in keeping with normal infant feeding guidelines, and provide skilled support to all mothers who choose to breastfeed.

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