



## Ankyloglossia in neonates: action for breastfeeding in pandemic times

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

Natural breastfeeding is a fundamental issue to guarantee the child's health. It is translated into the building of three important pillars erected under the optics of promotion, protection, and unlimited and reinforced support to women. A good start in life is fundamental and can only happen if there are favorable conditions for the practice of healthy feeding accompanied by the affection and well-being provided by breastfeeding. The advantages of breastfeeding for the child, its mother, the family, and society are countless, undeniable, and unquestionable. Current scientific evidence proves that human milk provides better child development. For these and other reasons, the development of several actions to promote breastfeeding is a priority (ABRÃO et al., 2009).

However, early weaning is still frequent, and one of the main causes are breast lesions. Its incidence is high, resulting in intense pain and discomfort to the mother during breastfeeding that prevent its continuation. Thus, a qualified and humanized puerperal care is provided through the incorporation of welcoming conducts and necessary interventions by health professionals.

The puerperal woman is faced with difficulties of various origins. The problems resulting from breastfeeding can directly interfere (CERVellini et al., 2014) in the natural life process of the mother-child binomial, especially breast trauma as mentioned above, which can be defined as the rupture, change or discontinuity of the skin of the nipple and areola region. The main causes and factors for the emergence of traumas are related to the incorrect positioning of the child and the mother, inadequate control of sucking, incorrect grasping of the nipple or areola by the baby, and also anatomical changes in the nipples (FIGUEIREDO et al., 2018).

Keeping the gaze on the mother-child binomial, ankyloglossia can be a factor of difficulty for breastfeeding. Ankyloglossia is a congenital anomaly characterized by an abnormally short lingual frenulum or with an insertion close to the apex of the tongue, thus limiting lingual movements in protrusion and elevation (ITO, 2014).



The prevalence of ankyloglossia in newborns ranges from 0.52% to 21%, being more frequent in males (LISONEK et al., 2017; FERRÉS-AMAT et al., 2017). For some authors this prevalence is underestimated, since cases of limited symptomatology are sometimes not diagnosed (VEYSSIERE et al., 2015).

A study suggests that newborns with altered lingual frenulum are more likely to present sucking difficulties and early weaning (FRAGA et al., 2020).

Since March 2021, when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a pandemic situation caused by the new coronavirus (Covid-19), the Ministry of Health initiated several actions to mitigate the spread of this disease in Brazil, and, in the second half of March, declared the existence of community transmission in the national territory, from the publication of Ordinance No. 454/GM/MS, March 20, 2020 (BRASIL, 2020).

In this scenario, some measures and actions were established in several professional practices seeking the readjustment of work processes in order to reduce the spread of the disease. The dentistry area, known for the close contact between professional and patient, was soon identified as an area of high potential for contamination by Sars-CoV-2 and, therefore, suffered great impact and a series of changes throughout the pandemic period. With the concern to guarantee breastfeeding, the Neonatal Dentistry service remained in operation.

## **2 OBJECTIVE**

To report the experience of the Neonatal Dentistry Service as a strategy to care for and guarantee breastfeeding in times of pandemic.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

This is a descriptive study, of the experience report type, for the presentation of the strategy adopted by the municipality of Barueri regarding the maintenance of the Neonatal Dentistry Service as one of the guarantees to Breastfeeding in times of the COVID 19 pandemic.

## **4 DEVELOPMENT**

In Brazil, taking into account the importance of breastfeeding for the growth and development of the newborn and the possible interference of ankyloglossia in the breastfeeding process, in June 2014, it was proposed and approved under Federal Law No. 13,002 (BRASIL, 2014), the mandatory performance of the lingual frenulum assessment protocol in infants, also known as the Little Tongue Test, with the goal of early diagnosis, treatment and monitoring of cases by the multidisciplinary team (MARTINELLI et al., 2013). Since its enactment, the Municipal Health Secretariat instituted the



screening in the Maternity Department of the municipality of Barueri and in conjunction with the Technical Coordination of Oral Health established a flow of care for neonatal ankyloglossia.

Two professionals specialized in Pediatric Dentistry are the reference for diagnosing ankyloglossia and phrenotomy, if necessary. For such based on the Technical Note N° 35/2018 of the Ministry of Health (BRASIL,2018), the professionals use the Bristol Tongue Assessment Protocol (BTAT) (FRAGA et al., 2021).

In the protocol four aspects are evaluated: the appearance of the tip of the tongue; the attachment of the frenulum to the lower alveolus; tongue elevation and tongue protrusion. The scores for the four items are added, and may vary from 0 to 8. In case of interference in breastfeeding attributed to the lingual frenulum and a score less than or equal to 3, frenotomy is the conduct adopted by the service.

From March 2020 when the pandemic state of COVID-19 was declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) (UNASUS, 2020), a great concern hovered over the professionals of the Neonatal Dentistry Service and the Technical Coordination of Oral Health so that the flow of care for ankyloglossia was preserved, which was maintained following all safety standards for the professionals involved. In the period from March, 2020 to December, 2021, 580 babies with suspected ankyloglossia were seen, 69% of whom received an indication for a phrenotomy, performed by the service professionals, and were able to have their right to breastfeed guaranteed.

## **5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Recognizing the needs of breastfeeding women and their families is a way to enhance the empowering experience of breastfeeding, the Neonatal Dentistry Service is one of the ways adopted by the city of Barueri to guarantee this empowerment.



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