

WHOOPING COUGH VACCINE

What is whooping cough (pertussis)?

Whooping cough (also known as pertussis) is a highly contagious illness that can be life threatening. The disease is most serious in babies less than 6 months of age – many babies are hospitalised with complications such as pneumonia and brain damage.

Babies less than 6 months of age are too young to be fully vaccinated.

What are the symptoms of whooping cough?

Whooping cough causes long bouts of coughing and choking making it hard to breathe. The 'whoop' sound is caused by gasping for air between coughing spells. A child with whooping cough may turn blue from lack of air, or vomit after a coughing spell.

Not all children get the 'whoop' and often older children and adults just have a cough.

The disease can last up to three months.

Infection with whooping cough does not give long lasting protection so re-infections can happen.

How does whooping cough spread?

Whooping cough is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing or close contact.

Someone with whooping cough can spread the disease for up to three weeks after the start of the cough.

Many babies who get whooping cough have been in contact with family members who have had a cough for longer than 2 weeks.

How common is whooping cough?

So far in 2012 there have been more than 400 cases of whooping cough – this is more than double the number of cases in 2011.

Most cases have been in babies less than 6 months of age and sadly two babies died as a result of whooping cough in 2012.

Is whooping cough common in other countries?

Yes, other countries such as Australia, Canada, the UK and US are also seeing large scale outbreaks - the US has reported more than 38,000 cases with 16 deaths so far in 2012.

How can whooping cough be prevented?

THE BEST WAY TO PREVENT WHOOPING COUGH IS BY VACCINATION

Whooping cough vaccine is offered to all children

- as part of the 6 in 1 vaccine at 2, 4 and 6 months of age .
(http://www.immunisation.ie/en/EXTRADOWNLOADS/Text_15375_en.html)
- at 4-5 years of age (4 in 1 vaccine)
(<http://www.immunisation.ie/en/SchoolProgramme/4in1andMMR/>)
- in 1st year of second level school (Tdap vaccine)
(<http://www.immunisation.ie/en/SchoolProgramme/Tdap/>)

All children should get these vaccines on time to protect them and babies too young to be vaccinated.

How long does the protection from whooping cough vaccine last?

The immunity from previous vaccination lasts about 10 years so adolescents and adults may get whooping cough again.

Why do pregnant women need to get whooping cough vaccine?

You should be given whooping cough vaccine to protect you and your baby from getting whooping cough.

The vaccine helps your immune system to produce antibodies to the whooping cough bacteria. If you are in contact with whooping cough the antibodies will attack these bacteria and will protect you from whooping cough. These antibodies will also pass to your baby in your womb and protect them during the first few months of life.

What vaccine should pregnant women get?

You should get a Tdap vaccine. This is a **low dose** tetanus (T), diphtheria (d) and acellular pertussis (ap) booster vaccine which protects against tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough (pertussis).

When should I get the whooping cough vaccine?

The best time to get the whooping cough vaccine is between 28 – 32 weeks of your pregnancy. Giving the vaccine at this time will give your baby the best protection.

Is there anyone who cannot get the vaccine?

The vaccine should not be given to

- those with a history of a severe allergic (anaphylaxis) reaction to a previous dose of whooping cough vaccine or any part of the vaccine.

It is not recommended:

- in the first 20 weeks of pregnancy

- if there is a history of a severe local reaction to a previous dose. You should not get a tetanus or diphtheria containing vaccines more often than every 10 years if you have a severe local reaction.

When should vaccination be postponed?

There are very few reasons why vaccination should be postponed. Vaccination should be rescheduled if you have an acute illness with a temperature greater than 38°C.

What can I expect following vaccination?

You may get soreness or redness around the injection site. You may experience a mild generalised reaction of fever and fatigue for up to 48 hours after receiving the vaccine.

What if I don't feel well after vaccination?

If you have a temperature after the vaccine, take paracetamol, as it is safe in pregnancy, and it's important for you and your baby to avoid fever.

Do not take ibuprofen or aspirin (unless advised by your obstetrician). Remember if you are unwell after getting a vaccine, it could be for some other reasons - don't assume it's the vaccine and seek medical advice if needed.

How long does it take the vaccine to work?

The vaccine starts to work within two weeks.

Can I get the vaccine later in pregnancy?

Yes. Getting the vaccine in later pregnancy will give you and your baby some protection.

Can I get the vaccine after my baby is born?

Yes. You can get the vaccine in the first week after your baby is born. This will protect you from catching whooping cough and passing it on to your baby. However vaccination after your baby is born means you cannot pass the antibodies to them for protection in their first few months.

What about breast feeding?

The vaccine is safe to give if you are going to or are breast feeding.

My baby was premature so what can I do?

Babies born before 32 weeks will not be protected as they will not get enough antibodies from you while in the womb.

The best way to protect them is

- to make sure other children in the house are fully vaccinated.
- to make sure all adults in the house get a whooping cough vaccine if they haven't had one in the last 10 years. Ideally they should get the vaccine 2 weeks before contact with the baby.

- to keep your baby away from anyone with a cough until they have had two of their routine vaccinations (at 4 months of age).

Can other adults reduce their risk of whooping cough?

Any adult who wishes to reduce their risk of infection to themselves or to young babies may get the vaccine.

I had whooping cough as a child so do I still need the whooping cough vaccine?

Yes the immunity from previous infection decreases over time so you should get the vaccine to protect you and your baby.

I had a recent tetanus booster. Can I have this vaccine now?

Yes no interval is required between Tdap and any previous tetanus vaccine.

Is it safe for pregnant women to be vaccinated?

Yes. The vaccine is safe for pregnant women. Whooping cough vaccine is recommended for pregnant women in the UK, US, New Zealand and Australia.

This whooping cough vaccine has been studied in pregnant women in the US and no risk as been found. Reactions are generally mild and serious side effects are very rare.

Can the vaccine give me whooping cough?

No. The vaccine cannot give you whooping cough because it does not contain any live viruses.

How do I get vaccinated?

Contact your GP to arrange for vaccination.

You will be charged for the vaccine and its administration.

Talk to your GP today.