

PERTUSSIS (WHOOPING COUGH) VACCINATION FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough (also known as pertussis) is a highly infectious respiratory illness caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*.

Whooping cough can affect people at any age. Infants less than 6 months of age are most at risk of developing serious complications from the disease. Whooping cough can be life threatening for a young infant.

Is my baby at risk?

Babies cannot be immunised against whooping cough until they are 6 weeks of age. Babies do not develop full protection against whooping cough until they have received 3 doses of the vaccine. Vaccination during the third trimester of pregnancy is effective in preventing whooping cough in newborn infants via the transfer of protection from mother to unborn child. The vaccine is best given at 28 weeks of pregnancy.

Is the vaccination safe?

Yes, the vaccine is safe for both the pregnant woman and baby during pregnancy. Risks are the same as for any vaccination (localised pain, redness and swelling at injection site, fever). Severe reactions are very rare. Studies have found no evidence of an increased risk of complications during pregnancy or for the baby.

What diseases will the vaccine protect me against?

The dTpa vaccine not only protects against whooping cough, it also provides protection against tetanus and diphtheria.

I recently received a tetanus shot, should I still have the pertussis vaccine?

Yes, to ensure your baby is protected against whooping cough, it is important to receive the vaccine from 28 weeks of pregnancy. If you have received a tetanus- and diphtheria-containing vaccine within the previous 18 months you may develop some redness, swelling and soreness at the injection site. The benefits of protection against whooping cough outweigh the risk of minor reactions to the vaccine.

How much will the vaccine cost?

Under the ACT Antenatal Pertussis Vaccination Program, the whooping cough vaccine is free for all pregnant women in the ACT during their third trimester. General Practices may charge a consultation fee.

Does my baby still need to be vaccinated?

Yes. Infants still need to be vaccinated in line with the National Immunisation Program Schedule at 2 months (can be given from 6 weeks); 4 months and 6 months of age to develop longer lasting immunity for the disease.

The Australian Immunisation Handbook (10th Edition) also recommends a DTPa (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis) booster at age 18 months.

Do I need to be vaccinated during every pregnancy?

Yes, it is important to have the vaccine in the third trimester of each pregnancy, even if they are close together. This will ensure protection against whooping cough for every baby.

Should my family be vaccinated?

It is also recommended that those who will be closest to your baby especially in the first weeks of life also receive a whooping cough vaccine. Make sure your other children are up to date with their vaccines and ask carers and close family members who have not had a whooping cough vaccine in the past 10 years to have a vaccination at least two weeks before they have any contact with your baby (vaccines for family members and contacts are not funded).

Useful Links

ACT Immunisation Information:
www.health.act.gov.au/immunisation

ACT Immunisation Information Line:
(02) 6205 2300.

Immunise Australia Program
www.immunise.health.gov.au

Acknowledgement

NHMRC, 2013, *The Australian Immunisation Handbook*, 10th Edition.

Australian Immunisation Handbook update at
<http://immunise.health.gov.au/>

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