

Whooping cough vaccine

Important information for pregnant women

2019



**Make your
appointment
from 16 weeks**
to get your
whooping cough
vaccine

There's a lot of whooping cough around at the moment and babies who are too young to start their routine childhood immunisations are at greatest risk.

This is why if you're 16 weeks pregnant or more you should talk to your midwife about local arrangements to get your whooping cough vaccine.



Important information at a glance

- If you're 16 weeks pregnant or more talk to your midwife about local arrangements to get your whooping cough vaccine as soon as possible.
- Young babies are more at risk than older children until they complete their course of immunisations, which start at 8 weeks of age.
- Whooping cough is a serious disease that can lead to pneumonia and permanent brain damage. It can also cause death – a number of babies have died in the UK in recent years because of whooping cough.
- In 2012, there was an outbreak of whooping cough in the UK and there were 1,926 cases in Scotland. Since then, although numbers have varied – for example, with 1,032 cases in 2016 and 443 cases in 2018 – annual case numbers remain higher than the levels seen in Scotland before the outbreak.
- You can help protect your unborn baby from getting whooping cough in his or her first weeks of life by having the whooping cough vaccine while you are pregnant. You should get immunised even if you've been immunised before or have had whooping cough yourself. The vaccine is needed in every pregnancy.
- Your baby will still need to be immunised as normal when they reach 8 weeks of age. The complete Routine Childhood Immunisation Programme is on the back cover of this booklet.

What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough (also known as pertussis) causes very bad coughing and choking, making it hard to breathe. The 'whoop' noise is caused by gasping for breath after each period of coughing. But not all people will make the 'whooping' sound, which can make it difficult to recognise the disease. Whooping cough usually lasts for two to three months. It's easily spread by breathing in tiny droplets that are released into the air when other people with the disease cough and sneeze.

Babies under 1 year of age are most at risk from whooping cough. For these babies, the disease can be very serious and can lead to pneumonia and permanent brain damage. In the worst cases, it can cause death.

Why are we seeing more outbreaks?

Cases of whooping cough have risen over the past few years. The cause of this increase is being investigated by government scientists and other experts. In the meantime, the important thing is to protect young babies, who are the most likely to suffer badly if they catch the disease.

Are we the only country to have this problem?

A number of other countries, including the US, have seen rising numbers of cases and deaths in young children. The US has also recommended that all women are immunised while they are pregnant.

Are there any risks to me or my baby if I'm immunised while I'm pregnant?

There's no evidence that immunising pregnant women with this type of vaccine can cause any harm. The whooping cough vaccine is not a live vaccine so it can't cause whooping cough in women who have the immunisation, or their babies.

A recent study in the UK (of nearly 18,000 pregnant women) found no safety concerns related to getting immunised against whooping cough when pregnant. Studies from the US of immunising pregnant women against whooping cough (with a similar type of vaccine to the one used in Scotland) have also found no evidence that the vaccine could harm pregnant women.

It's much safer for you to have the vaccine than to risk your newborn baby catching whooping cough.

What's in the vaccine?

You'll be given a combined vaccine that protects against four different diseases – whooping cough (pertussis), diphtheria, tetanus and polio – as there is currently no single, pertussis-only vaccine available.



Are there any side effects from being immunised while pregnant?

You may have some mild side effects from the immunisation, such as redness or tenderness where the vaccine was given (this will be an injection in the upper arm). Serious side effects are extremely rare, especially in adults.

How does getting immunised during pregnancy protect my baby?

The immunity you get from the vaccine will be passed to your baby across the placenta. The placenta is on the inside of the mother's womb and links the mother's blood supply with her unborn baby. The baby gets nourishment from the placenta. Getting immunised during pregnancy will help protect your baby in the first few vulnerable weeks of life, until they are old enough to have the routine immunisation at 8 weeks of age.

When will I get the immunisation?

Immunisation is recommended as soon as possible from week 16 of your pregnancy. The ideal time to have the vaccine is between weeks 16 and 32, but the sooner you get the vaccine the better. This means there is more time for your body to make antibodies and for these to be passed to your unborn baby. You may still have the vaccine after you are 32 weeks pregnant, but it will not offer your baby the same level of protection.

Ask your midwife about local arrangements to get your vaccine.

Will the immunisation definitely mean my baby doesn't get whooping cough?

No vaccine guarantees 100% protection, but this is the most effective way to help protect your baby from whooping cough in their first weeks of life.

Evidence from Scotland and the UK shows that immunising pregnant women is very effective at reducing the number of young babies getting whooping cough.

Remember that the immunity your baby receives from you will wear off, so make sure you take them for their routine immunisations at 8 weeks of age when they will receive their first dose of the whooping cough vaccine.

I'm still concerned about having an immunisation while I'm pregnant. Is there another way to protect my baby from whooping cough?

There is no other way to protect your baby from whooping cough. Their mother's protection (from either having whooping cough themselves or being immunised when they were young) has now worn off. Having the immunisation during pregnancy provides antibodies that will be passed to the baby so they have some protection in the first few weeks of life when whooping cough is most serious.

How long will my immunisation protect my baby from whooping cough?

The vaccine will help protect your baby during their first weeks of life. But your baby will still need the full course of four whooping cough immunisations to protect them, starting at 8 weeks of age.

Why can't my baby be immunised as soon as they are born?

A newborn baby is not ready to deal with this vaccine until 8 weeks of age, when they will receive the first of their immunisations to get full protection.

Babies are offered the whooping cough vaccine at 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age as part of their routine immunisations. They will then be offered a fourth immunisation at around 3 years and 4 months of age.

For information about the Routine Childhood Immunisation Programme see the back cover of this booklet.

I'm expecting twins – what should I do?

One immunisation will help protect all of your babies, no matter how many you're expecting.

What if I get pregnant again?

The whooping cough immunisation is recommended when you reach week 16 of any pregnancy. Make an appointment to get immunised every time you are pregnant.

I am going to breastfeed. Won't that protect my baby?

Unfortunately, not enough protection against whooping cough is passed in the breast milk to protect your baby.

I have other young children – do they need to be immunised too?

If you have other young children it's important to make sure that they're up to date with their immunisations. This will help these children avoid becoming infected with whooping cough and passing this on to your new baby. For more information on childhood immunisations, visit www.nhsinform.scot/immunisation



What should I do now?

If you're 16 weeks pregnant or more, please speak to your midwife to find out more.

Pregnancy immunisation checklist

Vaccine	When to have it	✓
Whooping cough	From week 16 of each pregnancy	
Flu	During flu season (October to March) at any time during your pregnancy	
MMR dose 1*	After your baby is born	
MMR dose 2*	Four weeks after first dose (as above)	

*If no previous immunisation

Can I have the flu vaccine and the whooping cough vaccine together?

If you're pregnant during the flu season (October to March) then you should have the flu vaccine as early as you can during pregnancy. If you're over 16 weeks pregnant and you still haven't had the flu vaccine, then you can and should have both vaccines. You can have them at the same time or separately – the vaccines don't interfere with each other if given together.

What about other infections during pregnancy?

Any illness where you have a fever and a rash could mean you have an infectious disease. This could harm your unborn baby. You must let your midwife, GP or obstetrician know straight away if you have a rash, or have any contact with another person with a rash at any time during your pregnancy.

Please avoid contact with any other pregnant women until you've been assessed. This includes any antenatal clinics or other maternity settings.


Where can I get more information?


Talk to your midwife, practice nurse or GP, or call NHS inform on **0800 22 44 88** (textphone 18001 0800 22 44 88). The helpline is open Monday to Friday, 8 am to 10 pm, and Saturday to Sunday, 9 am to 5 pm. It also provides an interpreting service. This information is also available at **www.nhsinform.scot/immunisation**

You can report suspected side effects of vaccines and medicines through the Yellow Card Scheme. Visit **<https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk>** or call the Yellow Card hotline on **0800 731 6789** (available Monday to Friday – 10 am to 2 pm).

This resource may also be made available on request in the following formats:



 www.nhsinform.scot/whoopingcough – click ‘Further information’ to access this leaflet in other languages

 **0131 314 5300**

 nhs.healthscotland-alternativeformats@nhs.net

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www.nhsinform.scot/confidentiality

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Routine Childhood Immunisation Programme

All immunisations are given as a single injection into the muscle of the thigh or upper arm, except rotavirus, which is given by mouth (orally) and flu, which is given as a nasal spray.

When to immunise	Diseases protected against	Vaccine given
8 weeks old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and hepatitis B (HepB) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six-in-one (DTaP/IPV/Hib/HepB)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pneumococcal disease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pneumococcal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotavirus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotavirus
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meningitis B (MenB) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MenB
12 weeks old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, Hib and HepB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six-in-one (DTaP/IPV/Hib/HepB)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotavirus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rotavirus
16 weeks old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, Hib and HepB 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six-in-one (DTaP/IPV/Hib/HepB)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pneumococcal disease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pneumococcal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meningitis B (MenB) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MenB
Between 12 and 13 months old – within a month of the first birthday	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hib and meningococcal group C 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hib/MenC
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pneumococcal disease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pneumococcal
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measles, mumps and rubella (German measles) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MMR
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meningitis B (MenB) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MenB
Every year aged 2 until the end of primary school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flu 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flu
3 years 4 months old or soon after	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough and polio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four-in-one (DTaP/IPV)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measles, mumps and rubella (German measles) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MMR (check first dose has been given)
Aged 11 to 13 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cancers caused by human papillomavirus (HPV) including cervical cancer (in women) and some head and neck, and anogenital cancers (in men and women) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HPV
Around 14 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tetanus, diphtheria and polio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Td/IPV, and check MMR status
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meningococcal groups ACWY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MenACWY