

# Protecting your newborn from whooping cough

## What is whooping cough (pertussis)?

Whooping cough is a highly contagious bacterial infection. It affects the lungs and airways and may cause a person to cough violently and uncontrollably, making it difficult to breathe.

The 'whoop' refers to the sound that is made when a deep breath is taken after a bout of coughing. The cough may last up to 3 months, even after antibiotic treatment is completed and the person is no longer infectious.

Babies less than 6 months of age are at the greatest risk of infection and severe illness. Young babies infected with whooping cough may stop breathing or turn blue, have apnoea (pauses in normal breathing), pneumonia, feeding problems and weight loss, seizures, brain damage and, in some cases, even die.

Older children and adults can also become infected with whooping cough and, while their symptoms are usually less severe, they can pass the infection to others, including babies too young to be vaccinated.

## Why should I get the whooping cough vaccine during pregnancy?

It helps protect your baby.

In Australia, the whooping cough vaccine is a combination vaccine that also protects against diphtheria and tetanus. The whooping cough vaccine is free for pregnant people under the National Immunisation Program.

When you get vaccinated during pregnancy, your body will pass on protective antibodies (proteins produced by the body to fight diseases) to your baby through your placenta. This is the most effective way to protect them in their first few months of their life, when they are most vulnerable to severe whooping cough infection and are too young to be fully vaccinated.

After birth, the whooping cough vaccine reduces your risk of catching whooping cough and passing it on to your newborn baby. Parents are a common source of whooping cough infection for children under 12 months, so it's important to get vaccinated to minimise the chance of bringing whooping cough infection into the home.

## When should I get vaccinated?

The optimal time for whooping cough vaccination is between 20 and 32 weeks of every pregnancy. This is when the transfer of protective antibodies from you to your baby is most effective and provides the best protection for your baby after birth.

It is also recommended to get the whooping cough vaccine in every pregnancy, including pregnancies which are closely spaced, for example, under 2 years apart. This is because your antibody levels will decrease over time and may not stay high enough to offer enough protection for future pregnancies.



## Is it safe to get the whooping cough vaccine while I'm pregnant?

Yes. The whooping cough vaccine is safe and recommended.

The whooping cough vaccine has been routinely administered to pregnant women in Australia since 2015. Careful monitoring of the vaccine has shown that it is safe for pregnant women and their developing babies. In addition, large international studies looking at birth outcomes following whooping cough vaccination during pregnancy have found no evidence of increased risk for adverse events at or after birth.

Breastfeeding after getting the whooping cough vaccine during pregnancy is safe and will pass on more protection against whooping cough to your baby after birth.

It is also safe and recommended to get the influenza vaccine during pregnancy. You can have these vaccines at the same time or at different visits.

## Are there any side effects from whooping cough vaccine in pregnancy?

With any medicine, including vaccines, there is a potential for side effects. These are usually mild and go away on their own. Serious reactions are possible but are rare. Most people who get a whooping cough vaccine do not have any problems with it.

The most common side effects of the whooping cough vaccine do not affect daily activities and get better on their own in a few days. These include mild redness, swelling, pain and tenderness where the injection is given. Other side effects include body-ache, fatigue or mild fever. Headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach ache and arm swelling have also been reported.

If you have ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction after a dose of whooping cough vaccine, or had a severe allergy to any part of this vaccine, you should not get the vaccine. Tell your doctor if you have any severe allergies.

## Do babies still need their own whooping cough vaccine?

Yes. The protection against whooping cough, that is passed on to babies by their mother having the vaccine, only lasts a short time. Babies still need to have their own vaccine. This should be given at 6 weeks of age, followed by 2 further doses at 4 and 6 months of age. All children should have booster doses of the whooping cough vaccine at 18 months and 4 years of age.



For more information, visit [healthywa.wa.gov.au](http://healthywa.wa.gov.au) or scan the **QR code** for the childhood immunisation schedule

## Where can I get more information?

- Talk to your doctor, obstetrician or midwife
- Phone Healthdirect on **1800 022 222**
- Phone the National Immunisation Information Line on **1800 671 811**
- In an emergency, dial triple zero (**000**) for an ambulance.



Name of vaccine recipient: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/20\_\_

Vaccinator's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Batch number: \_\_\_\_\_ (Apply sticker or write in)

Brand name:  Adacel  Boostrix  Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

You can access your immunisation history statement from Medicare or by calling the Australian Immunisation Register.



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