

Maternity information factsheet

Whooping cough (pertussis) vaccine in pregnancy (from 16 weeks onwards)

We have written this factsheet as a guide to having the whooping cough (pertussis) vaccine while you are pregnant (from 16 weeks onwards).

What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough (medically known as pertussis) is a serious infection that causes long bouts of coughing and choking, making it hard to breathe. The 'whoop' is caused by gasping for breath after each bout of coughing, though babies do not always make this noise.

Why do I need a whooping cough vaccine?

Whooping cough is a highly infectious, serious illness that can lead to pneumonia and permanent brain damage, particularly in young babies. Most babies with whooping cough will need hospital treatment. In very severe cases, whooping cough can be fatal.

The likelihood of your baby developing whooping cough in the first few weeks of life is reduced by 91% if you have the vaccine between 16 and 32 weeks of pregnancy. If you are more than 32 weeks pregnant, you can still have the vaccine but it may be less effective, especially after 38 weeks. The vaccine also protects your baby against diphtheria, tetanus and polio.

Please note that your baby will still need their routine vaccinations from eight weeks of age. Your health visitor will discuss this with you.

Is the whooping cough vaccine suitable for everyone?

Tell your midwife **before** you have the vaccine if you:

- have had the COVID-19 vaccination within the last 48 hours or are due to have it within the next 48 hours (we can still give you the vaccine but it may be better to have the vaccinations at separate times so that you can distinguish between any possible side effects)
- are currently **less than 16 weeks pregnant**
- are feeling feverish and unwell
- are experiencing a high temperature

We may advise you not to have the vaccine today if any of the above apply. We can rearrange your whooping cough vaccination appointment with you for another day.

You must also tell your midwife **before** you have the vaccine if you:

- have phenylketonuria, also known as PKU (a rare but potentially serious inherited disorder that prevents a person from breaking down the amino acid phenylalanine)
- have a blood clotting disorder which causes excessive bleeding after injections

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- have previously experienced:
 - an anaphylactic (severe and potentially life-threatening) allergic reaction
 - encephalopathy (serious condition in which the brain becomes swollen) of an unknown cause
 - any neurological (brain) complications after a previous vaccine of diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis or poliomyelitis
- have ever had an anaphylactic allergic reaction to:
 - diphtheria toxoid
 - tetanus toxoid
 - pertussis toxoid
 - filamentous haemagglutinin
 - pertactin
 - inactivated poliovirus
 - aluminium hydroxide
 - aluminium phosphate or 'Medium 199'
 - formaldehyde
 - glutaraldehyde,
 - streptomycin
 - neomycin
 - polymyxin
- have had the whooping cough vaccine already in this pregnancy

Having the vaccine **may not be appropriate** for you if any of the above apply. Please discuss this with your midwife.

Are there any side effects?

The whooping cough (pertussis) vaccine is very safe and serious side effects are rare.

The most common side effects are:

- mild discomfort, redness or tenderness at the site of the injection
- fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- headaches

Less common side effects include:

- nausea and vomiting
- abdominal discomfort
- mild fever

These side effects can be managed with paracetamol and will usually resolve within 72 hours.

Speak to your GP and your midwife if you experience any serious side effects that you think may be related to this vaccine.

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