

WHOOPING COUGH VACCINE PROGRAM FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

Information Sheet

To further protect newborn babies against whooping cough (pertussis), the Queensland Government is providing free whooping cough vaccine for pregnant Queensland women, where clinically appropriate, in their third trimester (from 28 weeks). This is a time-limited program for women who have not received a diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (dTpa) vaccination in the last five years.

Should I be concerned about whooping cough?

Yes. Whooping cough is widespread in Australia. That means anyone who is not up to date with vaccination can get whooping cough and also pass it on. If you get whooping cough while pregnant, or after your baby is born, there is a high chance you will pass it on to your baby. Whooping cough is a highly infectious, serious illness that can lead to pneumonia and brain damage, particularly in young infants. It is spread from person to person mainly by respiratory droplets in the air during coughing or sneezing. Symptoms include long bouts of coughing and choking, which make it hard to breathe. The 'whoop' is caused by gasping for breath after each bout of coughing, although babies don't always make this noise. In infants, whooping cough can be very serious and infants under six months of age are most at risk of severe complications. Most babies with whooping cough will need hospital treatment, and when whooping cough is very severe, may die.

Why are pregnant women advised to have the whooping cough vaccine?

Newborn babies (birth to six weeks) are too young to receive their first immunisation and are at greatest risk of severe complications if they contract whooping cough. By getting vaccinated against whooping cough during pregnancy, mothers can help protect their newborn from developing whooping cough in their first few weeks of their life. Mothers receive immunity from the vaccine, which passes to the baby through the placenta, so when the infant is born, they already have antibodies against whooping cough. This protects them until they are old enough to be routinely vaccinated against whooping cough from six weeks of age.

Is the whooping cough vaccine safe during pregnancy?

Yes. While it's understandable you might have concerns about the safety of having a vaccine during pregnancy there's no evidence to suggest the whooping cough vaccine is unsafe for you, or your unborn baby. Vaccination against whooping cough in pregnancy is recommended in The Australian Immunisation Handbook (10th Edition). The vaccine is also given in the United Kingdom (UK), United States (US) and New Zealand. Recent research from the UK program indicated no evidence that vaccination accelerated the time to delivery or increased the risk of still birth, maternal or neonatal death, pre-eclampsia, haemorrhage, fetal distress, uterine rupture, placenta or vasa praevia, caesarian delivery, low birth weight or neonatal renal failure. The vaccine is not 'live' and cannot cause whooping cough in either you or your baby.

Why does the product information state that dTpa is not recommended in pregnancy?

The vaccine used in the Queensland program is similar to that used in the UK and US programs. The product information says the vaccine is not recommended for use in pregnancy because of the routine exclusion of pregnant women from clinical trials. It is not because of any specific safety concerns or evidence of harm in pregnancy. Use in pregnancy is not contraindicated, which means that there is no medical reason why it should not be used.

The Australian Immunisation Handbook (10th Ed) recommends vaccination of pregnant women during the third trimester of pregnancy with an interval of 5 years between a previous dose and the expected delivery date.

What's your date to vaccinate?

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I was vaccinated against whooping cough as a child. Do I need to get vaccinated again?

Yes, unless you've been vaccinated against whooping cough in the past five years. Any protection you may have received through either having whooping cough or being vaccinated when you were young will have worn off.

I have had whooping cough. Do I still need to get vaccinated?

Yes. Anyone who has previously had whooping cough can become reinfected and spread infection to others, including to your baby who may be too young to be vaccinated.

Will my baby still need to be vaccinated against whooping cough at six weeks if I had the vaccine while pregnant?

Yes. Even if you received the whooping cough vaccine, your baby will still need to be vaccinated against whooping cough when they reach six weeks of age (as recommended in the Australian Immunisation Schedule).

When should I have the whooping cough vaccine?

The best time to get vaccinated to protect your baby is between 28 and 38 weeks of pregnancy. Vaccination after this time will help protect you from whooping cough and reduce the risk of you passing it on to your baby once they are born. However, it may not provide direct protection to your baby.

What are the side effects of the whooping cough vaccine?

As with any vaccine, you may experience some mild side effects such as headache, body ache, tiredness, swelling, redness or tenderness at the injection site. These can last up to a few days. Very rare side effects may include hypersensitivity reaction, paraesthesia, hypoesthesia, Guillain-Barré syndrome, brachial neuritis, facial palsy, convulsion, syncope, myelitis, anorexia, myocarditis, pruritis, urticaria, myositis and myalgia.

How do I report any side effects?

If you experience any unusual side effects following vaccination, contact your general practitioner (GP) immediately or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for further

advice. Adverse events will be reported to Queensland Health.

Are there any reasons for the vaccine not to be given?

There are very few reasons why a vaccine should not be given. Whooping cough vaccine should not be given to anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of whooping cough vaccine or to any component of the vaccine.

Before you are vaccinated, your GP will talk to you about any issues you may have experienced with previous vaccinations.

If you feel acutely unwell and have a fever, immunisation should be postponed until you have recovered.

Can I have the whooping cough vaccine at the same time as the flu vaccine?

Yes, you can have the two vaccines together. However, don't delay your flu vaccination to have both at the same time.

How can I get the whooping cough vaccination?

Vaccine will be available from GPs.

Talk to your midwife, obstetrician or GP at a routine antenatal appointment when you are between 28 and 38 weeks pregnant.

What if I'm planning pregnancy – should I get vaccinated against pertussis?

Yes. Immunisation is an important part of pregnancy planning. The Australian Immunisation Handbook recommends that women planning pregnancy get vaccinated against a number of diseases including whooping cough. Please discuss this with your doctor. Whooping cough vaccine is not funded for women prior to pregnancy.

Queensland Health's Privacy Statement is included on the back of the consent form, please read carefully.

Adapted from NHS fact sheet: Whooping cough vaccination in pregnancy, 2014.

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