

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS) VACCINE DURING PREGNANCY

INFORMATION ADAPTED FROM:
NATIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON IMMUNIZATION (PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY OF CANADA)
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) is caused by a bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. It is an uncontrollable, violent cough that can make it hard to breathe. It is a very serious infection that can cause pneumonia, seizures, brain damage and even death. Babies younger than 1 year old might be hospitalized. Infants less than 2 months old make up the largest proportion admitted to special care units in hospitals. The best way to prevent Whooping Cough is by getting a vaccine. The vaccine that protects children and adults from Whooping Cough also protects them from Tetanus and Diphtheria.

For adults, including pregnant women, the vaccine is called Tdap or Adacel.

**The Whooping Cough vaccine is recommended DURING EACH pregnancy.
The best time to get the vaccine is between weeks 27 and 36 of your pregnancy.**

Why should you get the vaccine during pregnancy?

When you get the vaccine during pregnancy, you can protect your baby from getting the infection when they are born. Early short-term protection is very important. Your baby will not get their first Whooping Cough vaccine until they are 2 months' old. These first few weeks of life are when your baby is at the highest risk for catching Whooping Cough and have potentially severe life-threatening complications.

After you get the Whooping Cough vaccine, your body will create protective antibodies (proteins produced by your body to fight off diseases). This will prevent you from getting the infection. About 30-40% of babies get the infection from their mothers. These antibodies can also pass to your baby through the placenta before they are born. They can also pass through the breast milk. The antibodies provide your baby with short-term protection against Whooping Cough early in life and can prevent some of the serious complications that come along with Whooping Cough.

Your protective antibodies are at their highest 4 weeks after getting the vaccine. The transfer of the antibodies through the placenta is the best in the third trimester. The data for safety of the vaccine in pregnancy is strongest in the third trimester. This is why the best time to get the vaccine is between weeks 27 and 36.

The amount of antibodies in your body decreases over time. When you get the vaccine during one pregnancy, your antibody levels do not stay high enough to provide enough protection for future pregnancies. This is why you need to get the vaccine during each pregnancy to protect each baby.

I have never had the Whooping Cough vaccine before and I didn't get the vaccine during pregnancy. How can I protect my baby?

If you were not able to get the vaccine during pregnancy, you should get it right after you give birth. It will take about 2 weeks before you are protected. Once you are protected, you are less likely get the infection and give it to your baby. The protective antibodies that you make can also pass through the breast milk. By feeding your baby your breast milk, you can provide some protection to baby.

Keep in mind that your baby can still be at risk for catching Whooping Cough from other people. You might want to ask anyone who will be in contact with your baby to check with their doctor to see they need the vaccine to prevent them from getting the infection.

Is there a blood test I can do to check how many antibodies I have?

There is no test that tells us if you had the vaccine before or if you had Whooping Cough before. Even if you had the vaccine in the past, you should repeat the vaccine during pregnancy to boost up your antibodies.

To continue to protect your baby, it is important that your baby gets their routine vaccinations starting at 2 months' old.

Please see your family doctor or pediatrician for more information.