

Protect your baby by protecting yourself with a free whooping cough vaccine

Information for Victorian residents

Who is eligible for the free vaccine from 1 June 2015?

- **Pregnant women** in their third trimester (from 28 weeks) and **their partners** (who live with or will have regular contact with the baby)
- **Parents of newborn babies** (including adoptive parents and foster parents) born on or after 1 June 2015, (before the baby is six months old).

What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough, also known as pertussis, is a highly infectious disease that can cause a severe, persistent cough. In young babies the prolonged cough is often followed by periods of being unable to breathe and/or vomiting. Coughing can be followed by a “whooping” sound as the baby struggles to draw in air. Whooping cough is spread by coughs and sneezes from an infected person.

Severe complications such as pneumonia, convulsions, coma, and permanent brain and lung damage can occur.

Whooping cough is most serious in babies under six months of age. They are especially vulnerable to the infection and are not fully protected against whooping cough until their six-month vaccination schedule is complete.

Most deaths and hospitalisations are in babies under six months old. Some babies will suffer permanent disability from brain damage and lung damage.

Around one in every 200 babies under six months of age who catches whooping cough will die.

Why should I get the vaccine?

You should get the vaccine to protect your baby against whooping cough. Whooping cough continues to circulate in our community. Even if you were vaccinated as a child, you may no longer be protected; immunity provided by the vaccine (or by previous infection with whooping cough) fades over time.

When should I get the vaccine?

Pregnant women should get the vaccine in the third trimester of every pregnancy. A pregnant woman receiving the vaccine protects herself and passes on protective antibodies to her baby through the placenta. This means the baby is born with some immunity to whooping cough. For this reason the vaccine is recommended and free for pregnant women in every pregnancy, regardless of how long it has been since they last received the vaccine. Research suggests that the third trimester is the best time to receive the vaccine in order to pass on the best protection for the baby.

Partners of pregnant women, who have not had the vaccine in the last 10 years, should receive the vaccine while their partner is in the third trimester, to ensure they have developed immunity before the birth of their baby. The vaccine takes two weeks to work.

Parents of newborn babies should get the vaccine as soon as possible following the birth, if not vaccinated

during pregnancy or in the previous ten years, to protect them from catching and passing on the infection to their baby. The vaccine is free for parents whose babies are less than six months of age.

Parents and family members are the main source of whooping cough infection in babies.

How do I get the free vaccine?

Ask your doctor, obstetrician or midwife about getting the free whooping cough vaccine which also contains protection against diphtheria and tetanus. Immunisation nurses employed by some local councils may also provide the vaccine. Contact your local council directly or ask your maternal and child health nurse. While the vaccine itself is free for eligible groups, the provider may charge a fee for delivering the vaccine.

What other ways can I protect my baby from whooping cough?

- Immunise your baby on time, every time. Your baby should receive their vaccines at two, four and six months of age. The first dose can be given as early as six weeks of age*.
- Make sure all your children are fully immunised. All children in Australia are eligible for free vaccines under the National Immunisation Program. The current program* provides free booster doses against whooping cough at four years old and 12-13 years old.
- Ask those in close contact with your baby to have the vaccine.
- For people in close contact with newborn babies (for example other people who live in the house with the baby, relatives, childcare workers) the vaccine is recommended once every 10 years, however the vaccine may not be free.

*As per the National Immunisation Program on 1 May 2015

I've heard that vaccinated people can still catch whooping cough. Is this true?

The adult vaccine is around ninety-two per cent effective; meaning that some people who are vaccinated may still catch whooping cough. The whooping cough vaccine is the best protection available to prevent the spread of this disease.

What other vaccines are recommended during pregnancy?

Influenza (flu) vaccine is recommended at any time during pregnancy and is free for pregnant women.

Influenza infection can cause serious complications in a pregnant woman, which may include the need for hospital treatment. Evidence shows that vaccination against influenza while pregnant can provide protection for the baby in the first six months after birth.

How safe are the recommended vaccines during pregnancy?

The recommended vaccines are safe during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. Whooping cough vaccine has been routinely given to pregnant women in the United Kingdom and the United States of America for several years and is recommended for all pregnant women in Australia. A number of large scale scientific studies from the UK and US have shown no increased risk of any adverse outcomes for mothers or babies.

Similarly, influenza vaccine has been provided free to pregnant women in Australia since 2010 and is recommended for every pregnancy.

It is important to be comfortable with decisions you make about vaccination during pregnancy. Your doctor or immunisation provider is a good source of information if you have questions or concerns about vaccine safety.

Where can I get further information about whooping cough, influenza and the vaccines during pregnancy?

More information is available from your doctor or practice nurse; your obstetrician; your midwife; maternity hospital staff; your maternal and child health nurse; the Department of Health & Human Services Immunisation Section, phone 1300 882 008 or the following websites:

- www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au
- www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation

Translations

This fact sheet is available at

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation/factsheets/language.htm> in the following languages:

- Arabic
- Simplified Chinese
- Vietnamese
- Turkish
- Farsi
- Somali
- Hindi.

To receive this document in an accessible format phone the Immunisation Section on 1300 882 008. Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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