



# WHOOPING COUGH VACCINE PROGRAM FOR PREGNANT WOMEN

Information sheet (updated May 2016)

**The Queensland Government is providing free whooping cough vaccine for women in their third trimester of pregnancy to protect newborn babies against whooping cough (pertussis). The vaccination is a combined diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (dTpa) injection. Women should be vaccinated during each pregnancy to provide maximum protection for their newborn baby.**

## What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough is a highly infectious, serious illness that can lead to pneumonia and brain damage. Symptoms include long bouts of coughing and choking making it hard to breathe. Young infants are most at risk of serious complications, including death.

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

Newborn babies (up to six weeks of age) are too young to receive their first immunisation.

Vaccination during pregnancy can protect newborns from contracting whooping cough until they are old enough to be vaccinated against whooping cough from six weeks of age.

## Is the whooping cough vaccine safe for my unborn baby?

Yes. Vaccination during pregnancy is recommended by Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council in *The Australian Immunisation Handbook* (10th Edition).

The vaccine is also offered in other Australian states, the United Kingdom, United States and New Zealand. Studies have found no evidence of an increased risk for the baby or the mother related to whooping cough vaccination during pregnancy.

## When should I have the whooping cough vaccine?

Vaccination is recommended with each pregnancy to provide maximum protection for your newborn baby. This includes pregnancies which are close together (e.g. less than two years).

*The Australian Immunisation Handbook* recommends vaccination of pregnant women early in the third trimester (preferably between 28 and 32 weeks), but it can be given any time during the last three months of pregnancy.

Vaccination after delivery will help protect you from whooping cough and reduce the risk of you passing it on to your newborn. However, this may not provide direct protection to your baby once born.

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

Yes. Any protection you may have received from your childhood vaccinations 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 still become reinfected and spread infection to others, including to your baby.

## How can I get vaccinated against whooping cough?

The vaccine is available – free of charge for pregnant women – from your general practitioner (GP). Your GP may charge a consultation fee.

Download the free **VacciDate** app to get reminders when your child's vaccinations are due.

**Download VacciDate**  
FREE from your app store.



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## **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 at six to eight weeks of age (as recommended in the Australian Immunisation Schedule).

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

The whooping cough vaccine should not be given to someone 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 or your local vaccination provider will talk to you about any issues you may have experienced with previous vaccinations.

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

## **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.

While the vaccine is generally safe and well-tolerated in adults, there is a small risk of significant injection site reactions following subsequent doses during successive, closely spaced pregnancies.

Serious adverse events are very rare.

Please discuss potential side effects with your GP or your local vaccine provider.

## **How do I report any side effects?**

If you experience any unusual side effects following vaccination, contact your GP or your local vaccine provider immediately or call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for further advice. Adverse events will be reported to Queensland Health.

## **Can I be vaccinated against whooping cough and influenza at the same time?**

Yes. You can get the whooping cough and influenza (flu) vaccinations at the same time or at different times during your pregnancy. The influenza vaccine is different each year and is usually available from April (but check with your GP about availability when making an appointment). For the best protection against the flu, you should be vaccinated as soon as possible in the flu season, regardless of which trimester of pregnancy you are in. However, you should wait until you are in the third trimester to get whooping cough vaccine.

## **Can I still breastfeed if I receive the vaccination during pregnancy?**

Yes. Vaccination during pregnancy is still safe for breastfeeding mothers.

## **The product information states that dTpa is not recommended in pregnancy. Why?**

Product information is included with all medication to provide consumers with details, such as dosage and recommended use. The product information for dTpa vaccine states it is not recommended for use in pregnancy. This is because pregnant women are routinely excluded from clinical trials when vaccines are being developed. There is no medical reason why the dTpa vaccine should not be used in pregnant women.

## **Should my partner and other household members be vaccinated as well?**

Most young babies with whooping cough catch it from a parent or close family member. Adults in close contact with infants should consider the benefits to the baby and themselves by being vaccinated at least 2 weeks before beginning close contact with the infant. Vaccination for partners and carers is not funded by the government. They will need to obtain a prescription for the vaccine from their GP and purchase the vaccine from a pharmacy. You should ensure that all children and adults in your household are up to date with their whooping cough vaccinations – check with your GP.