

The whooping cough vaccine

for pregnant women

Read more about immunisation for pregnant women and their babies at skai.org.au

Whooping cough, also known as pertussis, is a serious infection that can cause severe illness and even death in babies under six months. Getting vaccinated against whooping cough during pregnancy is the most effective way to protect both you and your baby. It is recommended that you have a whooping cough vaccination every time you are pregnant, ideally between 20 and 32 weeks. The vaccine is free for all pregnant women in Australia.

Benefits for babies whose mothers were vaccinated against whooping cough



less likely to catch whooping cough during the first three months⁹



vaccine results in no greater risk of premature birth, low birth weight, small size for gestational age, stillbirth, neonatal death or congenital abnormalities¹⁰

What are the risks of whooping cough for my baby?

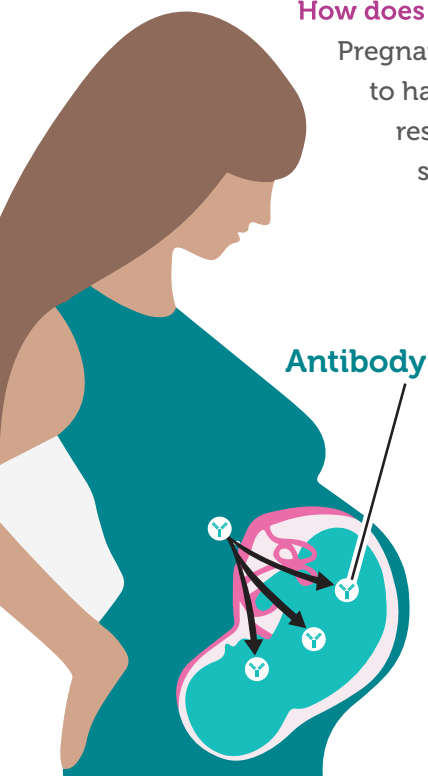
Whooping cough (pertussis) can cause life-threatening complications in babies, including pneumonia and brain damage. Whooping cough is a bacterial infection of the nose, throat and lungs. It irritates the airways causing thick mucus and long, severe coughing fits that usually end with a gasping breath that can sound like a 'whoop'. Babies under three months of age who develop severe whooping cough infection usually develop pneumonia, which can be complicated by low blood pressure and organ failure¹. Babies under three months who develop whooping cough have the highest risk of whooping cough-related death¹⁻⁷.

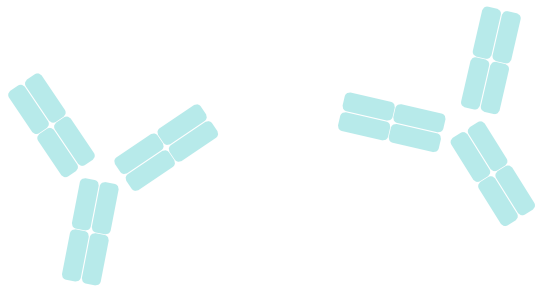
How does whooping cough affect pregnant women?

Pregnant women with whooping cough are likely to have prolonged coughing fits, sometimes resulting in vomiting, cracked ribs, disturbed sleep, incontinence and fainting⁸.

How effective is the vaccine?

The best way to protect your baby against whooping cough is to get the vaccine during pregnancy, so that the protective antibodies your body produces can be passed on to your baby. These antibodies will protect your baby against whooping cough for the first few months of life. You can read more about the effectiveness of the whooping cough vaccine at skai.org.au.





How does the whooping cough vaccine work?

The whooping cough vaccine contains 'antigens' which are small parts of the whooping cough (pertussis) bacteria that cannot reproduce themselves or cause disease. When your immune system detects the antigens, it produces antibodies to fight them. When you are pregnant, the antibodies your immune system produces will cross the placenta to give your baby protection against the disease, too. To give babies best protection at birth, mothers should have the vaccine between 20 and 32 weeks of pregnancy and at least seven days before delivery.

Is it safe to get the vaccine when you're pregnant?

Yes, the recommended whooping cough vaccine is safe for pregnant women and for their babies. Research tells us that being vaccinated against whooping cough during pregnancy does not increase the risk of premature delivery, stillbirth, neonatal death (death during the first 28 days of life), low birth weight or birth defects¹⁰. You can read more about these and similar studies at skai.org.au.

How will I react to the vaccine?

Most people who have the whooping cough vaccine have no reaction at all. A small number of people have mild reactions that last between 12 and 24 hours and are easily treated at home. These include:

- redness or soreness at the spot where the needle went in
- headache
- mild fever of around 38.5° or less.

A very small number of people have a severe allergic reaction to vaccines, called 'anaphylaxis'. Anaphylaxis can lead to swelling, hives, breathing difficulties, lowered blood pressure and, in severe cases, shock. Anaphylactic reactions to vaccination occur in about one in a million people. Midwives, nurses and GPs are trained to respond to anaphylactic reactions with adrenaline.

If you have any worries about how you feel after your vaccination, you can get help from your doctor, or your nearest emergency department, or by calling Health Direct on 1800 022 222.

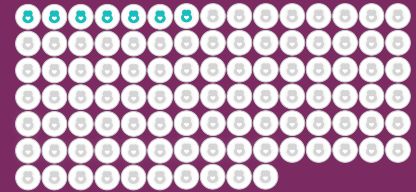
References

For links to the references used in this factsheet, please go to skai.org.au.

Vaccination risks

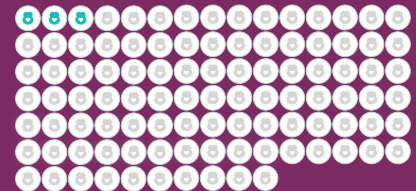
Risk of redness and soreness around the site of the injection

Around 7 in 100 women vaccinated against whooping cough during pregnancy experienced redness and soreness around the injection site¹¹.



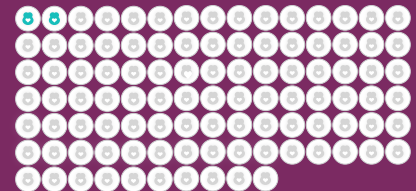
Risk of headache

Around 3 in 100 women vaccinated against whooping cough during pregnancy experienced a headache¹¹.



Risk of a fever less than 38.5°

Around 2 in 100 women vaccinated against whooping cough during pregnancy experience a fever of 38.5° or less¹¹.



Risk of a reaction serious enough to see a doctor or attend a hospital

Around 1 in 100 pregnant women vaccinated against whooping cough had a reaction that required a visit to a doctor. Around 1 in 1000 attended hospital to recover from an adverse reaction to the whooping cough vaccine¹¹.

