



# Protect your baby with the whooping cough vaccine

**Getting the whooping cough vaccine in pregnancy will protect your baby.**

**The vaccine is free of charge at your GP practice.\***

**The best time to get the vaccine is between 16 and before 36 weeks of pregnancy.**

By getting the whooping cough vaccine when you are pregnant, you can make sure your baby is protected from the moment they are born.

**Contact your GP to book an appointment.**

\* The vaccine is free of charge at your GP practice. However if your GP has a fully private clinic, they may charge you a fee for the visit to get the vaccine.

## What is whooping cough (pertussis)?

**Whooping cough (or pertussis) is a highly contagious infection that can be life threatening.**

The infection is most serious in babies under 6 months. Many babies with whooping cough are taken into hospital with complications such as pneumonia and brain damage.

Babies under 6 months are too young to be fully vaccinated themselves. This is why it's important to prepare in advance, and get the vaccine when you are pregnant.

## What are the symptoms?

**Whooping cough causes long spells of coughing and choking making it hard to breathe.**

The 'whoop' sound is caused by gasping for air between coughing spells. A child with whooping cough may turn blue from lack of air, or vomit after a coughing spell.

Not all children get the 'whoop', and often older children and adults just have a cough.

The cough can last up to 3 months. If your child gets whooping cough, this does not mean they cannot get it again.

You can read about vaccinating your child on page 10 of this leaflet.

## How does it spread?

**Whooping cough is spread from person to person by coughing, sneezing or through close contact.**

Someone with whooping cough can spread the infection for up to 3 weeks after the start of the cough.

Many babies who get whooping cough have been in contact with family members who have had a cough for longer than 2 weeks.

## How can it be prevented?

**The best way to prevent whooping cough is by getting the vaccine.**

If you are pregnant, your GP can give you the whooping cough vaccine free of charge between weeks 16–36 of your pregnancy.

If you have recently arrived in Ireland from another country, you should get the whooping cough vaccine during pregnancy to help protect your baby.

## Can the vaccine give me whooping cough?

**No.** The vaccine cannot give you whooping cough because it does not contain any live bacteria.

## How does getting the vaccine in pregnancy protect me and my baby?

The vaccine makes your immune system produce high levels of antibodies to the whooping cough bacteria. These antibodies also pass to your baby in the womb and will protect them during the first months of their life.

It is now known that babies whose mothers got the whooping cough vaccine during pregnancy are much less likely to get whooping cough during the first months of life.

## I was vaccinated against whooping cough as a child, do I need to get vaccinated again?

**Yes.** It is very important that you get vaccinated in pregnancy. The vaccine you have while you are pregnant is to protect your baby.



## When should I get the vaccine?



You can get the whooping cough vaccine between **16–36 weeks** of your pregnancy.

There are not many reasons why vaccination should happen later. Your vaccination can be rescheduled if you are unwell with a temperature of greater than 38°C.

## What is the name of the whooping cough vaccine in pregnancy?

**The vaccine given in pregnancy to protect against whooping cough is the Tdap vaccine.**

It is a low dose booster vaccine to protect against:

- ✓ tetanus (T)
- ✓ diphtheria (d)
- ✓ acellular pertussis (ap) (whooping cough)

## Do I need to get the vaccine in every pregnancy?

**Yes.** The antibodies you develop after vaccination decline over time. This means you need to get the vaccine in each pregnancy. You can then make the antibodies that will pass to your baby in your womb.

## What can I expect after?

You may get redness or feel sore around where you received the injection. You may experience a mild, general reaction such as fever and fatigue for up to 48 hours.

## What do I do if I feel unwell?

If you have a temperature after the vaccine, you can take paracetamol. **Do not take ibuprofen or aspirin** to treat a temperature after vaccination in pregnancy.

Remember if you are unwell after getting a vaccine, it could be for some other reason – don't assume it's the vaccine. Speak to your doctor if you need to.

## Reporting side effects

If you think you have had a side effect after receiving a vaccine, you can report it to the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) at [www.hpra.ie](http://www.hpra.ie).

Your doctor, nurse, pharmacist or a family member can also report the side effect to the HPRA.

## Is it safe for pregnant women to be vaccinated?

**Yes.** The vaccine is safe in pregnancy. Whooping cough vaccine is recommended for pregnant women in Ireland and in other countries like the UK, US, New Zealand and Australia.

This whooping cough vaccine has been studied in pregnant women and no risk has been found. Reactions are generally mild and serious side effects are very rare.

## Is there anyone who shouldn't get the whooping cough vaccine?

**You should not get the vaccine if you:**

- have a history of a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of whooping cough vaccine or any part of the vaccine.
- had a painful swollen arm after a previous dose. (This is very uncommon). You should not get the vaccine more often than every 10 years if you had a severe local reaction.

## My baby was premature; will my baby be protected from whooping cough if I am vaccinated?

Babies born before 32 weeks may not get enough antibodies from you while in the womb. However, the vaccine will reduce the risk of you infecting your baby with whooping cough.

**You can also protect your premature baby from whooping cough by:**

- making sure other children in the house are fully vaccinated
- making sure all adults in the house are fully vaccinated.



**If anyone in the family has not had a whooping cough vaccine in the last 10 years, they should get it 2 weeks before contact with the baby.**

## I was vaccinated during pregnancy; does my baby still need the whooping cough vaccine?

**Yes.** The antibodies you pass to your baby in the womb decline rapidly in the first six months of life.

So, it is important your baby gets the routine childhood vaccines (which include whooping cough vaccine) on time.

Whooping cough vaccine is offered to all children free of charge:

- as part of the 6-in-1 vaccine at 2, 4, 6 and 13 months of age
- at 4–5 years of age (4-in-1 vaccine)
- in their first year of second level school (Tdap vaccine).

When your child gets these vaccines on time, they continue to be protected against whooping cough.

You can read more about the whooping vaccine at [mychild.ie](http://mychild.ie) and [immunisation.ie](http://immunisation.ie)

## How do I get vaccinated?

Contact your GP to book an appointment.

Your GP can give you the whooping cough vaccine free of charge if you are pregnant.

However if your GP has a fully private clinic, they may charge you a fee for the visit to get the vaccine.

Published by: **HSE National Immunisation Office**

Publication date: **March 2025**