**Whopping cough (pertussis)**

**FAQs**

**What is whooping cough?**

Whooping cough is a serious infection that causes long bouts of coughing and choking, making it hard to breathe. The "whoop" is caused by gasping for breath after each bout of coughing, though babies do not always make this noise.

It spreads very easily and can sometimes cause serious problems, which is why it's important for babies and children to get vaccinated against it.

**Why do I need to get the whooping cough vaccine in pregnancy?**

Whooping cough in babies under six months can be dangerous. The immunity you get from the vaccine passes to your baby through the placenta and protects them until they are old enough to be vaccinated at 8 weeks old. They will then receive the vaccine as part of the routine [6-in-1 vaccine](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/6-in-1-infant-vaccine/) – for babies at 8, 12 and 16 weeks.

**Is the vaccine safe in pregnancy?**

Pertussis-containing vaccine (whooping cough vaccine) has been used routinely in pregnant women in the UK since October 2012. There is no evidence to suggest that the whooping cough vaccine is unsafe for you or your unborn baby and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is continuously monitoring its safety.

The [MHRA's study of around 20,000 vaccinated women published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ)](http://www.bmj.com/content/349/bmj.g4219) found no evidence of risks to pregnancy or babies.

**Can me or my baby get whooping cough from the vaccine during pregnancy?**

The whooping cough vaccine is not a live vaccine so it can’t cause whooping cough in you or your baby if you have the vaccine. It’s safer for you to have the vaccine than to risk your newborn baby catching whooping cough.

**How can I get the whooping cough vaccination?**

The vaccine is available from your GP, though some antenatal clinics also offer it. You may be offered the vaccination at a routine antenatal appointment from around 16 weeks of your pregnancy.

If you are more than 16 weeks pregnant and have not been offered the vaccine, talk to your midwife or GP and make an appointment to get vaccinated.

**Will my baby still need to be vaccinated against whooping cough at 8 weeks if I've had the vaccine while pregnant?**

Yes. Whenever you have the whooping cough vaccine, your baby will still need to be vaccinated according to the normal [NHS vaccination schedule](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/nhs-vaccinations-and-when-to-have-them/) when they reach 8 weeks old. Babies are protected against whooping cough by the [6-in-1 vaccine](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/6-in-1-infant-vaccine/).

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

Yes, because any protection you may have had through either having whooping cough or being vaccinated when you were young is likely to have worn off and will not provide sufficient protection for your baby.

**I was vaccinated against whooping cough in a previous pregnancy, do I need to be vaccinated again?**

Yes, you should get re-vaccinated from 16 weeks in each pregnancy to maximise protection for your baby.

**What are the side effects of the whooping cough vaccine?**

After having the whooping cough vaccine, you may have some mild side effects such as swelling, redness or tenderness where the vaccine is injected in your upper arm. This is normal after having a vaccine and it should only last a few days.

Other side effects can include a high temperature, irritation at the injection site, nausea and loss of appetite, tiredness and headache. Serious side effects are extremely rare.