



**WHOOPING COUGH**  
in young babies

Ask about the free vaccine today.  
[health.gov.au/immunisation](http://health.gov.au/immunisation)



**National  
Immunisation  
Program**

A joint Australian, State and Territory Government Initiative

# PROTECT YOUR BABY FROM WHOOPING COUGH. VACCINATE FOR FREE WHEN PREGNANT.

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## What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough (also known as pertussis) is a highly infectious bacterial infection that spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It affects the lungs and airways and may cause a person to cough violently and uncontrollably, making it difficult to breathe. People who are not vaccinated are at high risk of catching whooping cough.

## What are the symptoms?

- Whooping cough starts like a cold with a blocked or runny nose, sneezing, fever and an occasional cough.
- The cough gets worse and severe bouts of uncontrollable coughing develop.
- Coughing bouts can be followed by vomiting, choking or a 'whooping' sound.
- Some newborns don't cough at all but can stop breathing and turn blue.

## Whooping cough can be serious for babies

- Whooping cough can cause serious complications including brain damage and pneumonia and sometimes death.
- Babies under six weeks of age are too young to get vaccinated against whooping cough themselves.
- Babies do not complete their primary vaccination course against whooping cough until 6 months of age.

## Pregnant women can protect their babies from whooping cough

- The most effective way to protect young babies from whooping cough is for you to be vaccinated during pregnancy.
- By getting vaccinated, you pass on protective antibodies through the placenta to your baby that protects them in their first few months of life, when they are most vulnerable.
- Vaccination during pregnancy is very effective – it has been shown to reduce whooping cough disease in babies aged less than 3 months by over 90%.

## Timing of vaccination

- The recommended timing for whooping cough vaccination in pregnancy has recently changed.
- To maximise protection for your baby, vaccination is now recommended as a single dose between 20 and 32 weeks in each pregnancy.

## Whooping cough vaccination is safe in pregnancy

- Studies show no increased risk of complications such as stillbirth for pregnant women or their developing babies following vaccination during pregnancy.
- Side effects from receiving the whooping cough vaccine are usually mild. Some common side effects can include pain, redness and swelling where the vaccine is given, muscle aches, or fever. However, these side effects are no more common in pregnant women than non-pregnant women.

## Frequently asked questions

*Q: Is the whooping cough vaccine free for pregnant women?*

Yes. The vaccine is free for pregnant women through the National Immunisation Program.

*Q: Does my baby still need to get vaccinated if I get vaccinated in pregnancy?*

Yes. Your baby will still need to be vaccinated against whooping cough according to the National Immunisation Program childhood schedule. This includes vaccinations against whooping cough at 2 months (can be given from 6 weeks), 4 months, and 6 months of age. Following the schedule and recommended timing is the best way to maintain protection for your child.

*Q: Should my family be vaccinated?*

The most important person in the family to be vaccinated, to give the highest protection to your newborn baby, is the mother during pregnancy. Vaccination of other family members does not provide your baby with protective antibodies. However, vaccination of family members can protect them and minimise the chance of bringing whooping cough infection into the home.

*Q: What other vaccinations are recommended during pregnancy?*

The influenza vaccine is also free for pregnant women through the National Immunisation Program. It is safe and provides protection for pregnant women and their young babies.

## Where can I get more information?

Ask your immunisation provider about the free vaccine today.

### **Get in touch with your state health department:**

**SA Health** 1300 232 272

[health.gov.au/immunisation](http://health.gov.au/immunisation)

All information in this publication is correct as at March 2019.