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Your guide to
Vaccinations

Whooping cough and pregnancy

What you need to know and do
to help protect your baby



There is a lot of whooping cough around at the moment and babies who are too young to start their vaccinations are at greatest risk.

Expectant mothers can help protect their babies by getting themselves vaccinated against whooping cough from week 28 of their pregnancy.

This leaflet describes the problem and what you need to do to help protect your baby from this serious disease.

What is the problem?

You may have thought that whooping cough had died out but since 2010 there has been an increasing number of people getting the disease in this and other countries. Since then, there has been a rapid rise in whooping cough, with a big increase in cases in young babies.

We do not know why this is happening but the causes are being investigated. The important thing now is to protect those young babies who are most likely to suffer badly if they catch the disease.

Why should I be concerned?

Whooping cough is a serious disease that can lead to pneumonia and permanent brain damage. Many babies with whooping cough will be admitted to hospital and they are at risk of dying from the disease.

Deaths from whooping cough are rare but 14 babies under the age of three months died in the UK in 2012.

But aren't babies vaccinated to protect them against diseases?

Yes they are, but the babies that have been getting whooping cough are generally too young to have started their normal vaccinations so they are not protected against the disease. Babies' immune systems don't make good responses to the vaccine until they are two months old and they need three doses to build up full protection.



So how can I protect my baby?

The only way you can help protect your baby from getting whooping cough in the first weeks after birth is by having the whooping cough vaccination yourself while you are pregnant. You will then pass some immunity to your baby before he or she is born.

The best time to get vaccinated is between weeks 28 and 32 of your pregnancy but you can still have the vaccination later in pregnancy ideally before 38 weeks.

You should have the vaccination even if you were vaccinated when you were younger or had whooping cough yourself.

Is it OK to have a vaccination while I'm pregnant?

Women in the USA are having these vaccinations during pregnancy and while the vaccine used there is very slightly different from the one used in the UK, there is no reason to believe that the safety of the vaccine used here will be any different.

The vaccine used here is called Repevax (R). This is a combination vaccine that also provides protection against diphtheria, tetanus, and polio. These vaccines have been given singly or in combination to pregnant women worldwide for many years without evidence of harm to the mother or baby. It's much safer for you to have the vaccine than to risk your newborn baby catching whooping cough.

But what about side effects from having the vaccine whilst pregnant?

There are no safety concerns related to having the vaccine during pregnancy. You may have some mild side effects from the vaccine that are common for all patients, such as swelling, redness or tenderness where the vaccine is given in your upper arm. Serious side effects are extremely rare, especially in adults.

What do I need to do now to help protect my baby?

If you are in week 28 or more of your pregnancy, your GP or midwife will contact you to arrange an appointment for you to have the vaccination. If you are in the earlier stages of pregnancy, wait until you hear from them.

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

Yes, your baby should be vaccinated according to the normal schedule.

Where can I get more information?

Visit: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk

or phone NHS Direct Wales on

0845 46 47

You can also speak to your GP or Midwife.

Copies of this leaflet are available by

e-mailing hplibrary@wales.nhs.uk or

telephoning **0845 606 4050**

This leaflet is available on the Welsh Government immunisation website at

www.wales.gov.uk/immunisation

Any queries about this leaflet can be addressed to:

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