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# Pregnancy – how to help protect you and your baby



This leaflet describes vaccinations recommended during and after pregnancy.

## Why do I need vaccinations?

Having recommended vaccinations during pregnancy (and after your baby is born) is one of the most effective things you can do to reduce the risk of vaccine preventable infections for you and your baby.

To protect yourself and your baby make sure:

- you are up to date with all your vaccinations.
- Your baby gets vaccinated at 8, 12 and 16 weeks to continue the protection during their most vulnerable years.

## Whooping cough (Pertussis)

### What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough spreads easily and is a serious disease in young babies that can lead to pneumonia and permanent brain damage. In 2012, there was an increase in the number of people getting whooping cough in the UK. 400 of these were babies under three months of age and of these 14 babies died.

## **Why do I need the whooping cough vaccine?**

Whooping cough is circulating in our community and babies who are too young to start their routine vaccinations are at greatest risk from the disease.

Expectant mothers can help protect their babies by getting themselves vaccinated against whooping cough during pregnancy. Your body will produce antibodies to whooping cough which are passed through the placenta to your baby. Your baby then has some protection against whooping cough when born.

## **When should I get vaccinated?**

You will be offered the whooping cough vaccine by your GP or maternity services from your 16th week of pregnancy. If you miss the recommended time, you can have the vaccine any time later in your pregnancy. The vaccine is a single injection in your arm. Because protection from whooping cough vaccine wears off over time, you should have the vaccine even if you had it when you were younger or if you have had whooping cough.

You should also have it again, if you had it in a previous pregnancy, as vaccination is needed in **each** pregnancy.

If you haven't heard from your GP or midwife, then make an appointment to have the vaccination at your earliest opportunity.

The whooping cough vaccine can be given at the same time as the flu vaccine. But don't wait until the winter season to have them together. Your baby will get the best protection if you have the vaccine from the 16th week of your pregnancy.

### **I thought babies were given the whooping cough vaccine?**

In the UK, babies are given the whooping cough vaccine at 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age. They are not given their whooping cough vaccines earlier than 8 weeks as it is not as effective. Babies need three doses of the vaccine to build up full protection.

### **Is the whooping cough vaccine safe to have during pregnancy?**

Yes. Studies have shown the whooping cough vaccine is very safe for you and your baby. You may have some of the common mild side effects. These include: swelling, redness and tenderness at the injection site.

It is much safer for you and your baby to have the vaccine than to risk your new-born catching whooping cough.

**Whooping cough can be a very serious illness for young babies. The best way to protect your baby is to have the free vaccine from the 16th week of your pregnancy. The protection will decline so it's important that your baby has their own vaccines on time at 8, 12 and 16 weeks of age.**

## Influenza (Flu)

### What is Flu?

Flu spreads easily and can cause serious illnesses which need to be treated in hospital. There are outbreaks every year, usually in winter. Flu is not the same as a bad cold. It causes many deaths.

### Why is flu more serious in pregnancy?

This is because of the normal changes that take place during pregnancy. Your immune system is naturally weakened to ensure that your pregnancy is successful, you may be less able to fight off infections. A pregnant woman who catches flu is more likely to need to stay in hospital than a woman who isn't pregnant. If a pregnant woman gets

flu, her baby is more likely to be born early or with a low birth weight, be stillborn or die within their first week. By having the vaccination, you reduce the chance of getting flu during pregnancy and so the risk of serious complications from flu is reduced.

### **What are the benefits for my baby?**

The effect of the vaccine is passed on to your baby and helps to protect your baby in the first 4–6 months of life when flu can be very serious. By having the vaccine, you will be less likely to catch flu and pass it on to your baby.

### **Is the flu vaccination safe to have during pregnancy?**

Yes. The flu vaccines offered to pregnant women contain only killed (inactivated) flu viruses and cannot cause flu. Since 2009, a number of countries have offered the flu vaccine routinely to all pregnant women. Studies show that inactivated flu vaccines are safe and effective.

### **What does vaccination involve?**

The flu vaccination is an injection into the arm. It's best to have the vaccine in early autumn before flu starts to circulate. It is usually available from the end of September

each year, but you can still have the vaccine at any time in pregnancy. It takes around 14 days to provide protection following vaccination.

You will need a flu vaccination every time you are pregnant during any flu season.

### **Are there any side effects of having the vaccine?**

The side effects of the flu vaccine are mild compared to the disease itself and are seen in all people, not just pregnant women. Soreness and redness at the injection site are most common. You may also get a headache, muscle aches, fever or tiredness; these usually last for a day or two after the vaccination as it starts to work.

### **What should I do if I think I have caught flu?**

Contact your GP urgently and tell them that you are pregnant. There is a medicine that you can take that can help relieve some of the symptoms, but you need to take it as soon as possible after symptoms start for it to work.

**Flu can be a serious infection for pregnant women and their babies. You should have a free flu vaccine during each pregnancy. It can be given at any stage of pregnancy and as early as possible in the flu season.**



## **Vaccination before or after pregnancy**

If you are planning to become pregnant, you should make sure you are up to date with all vaccinations.

### **Rubella (German measles)**

Rubella, or German measles, is a viral infection and spreads easily from one

person to another. It is normally a mild illness. Someone with rubella usually has a rash and feels unwell for about a week.

However, if you catch rubella in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, it can cause serious damage to your baby's brain, heart, eyes and hearing. This is called congenital rubella syndrome.

### **How can I protect myself and my baby from rubella?**

You will be protected from rubella if you have previously had the infection or if you have ever had two doses of a rubella containing vaccine e.g. Measles, Mumps and Rubella vaccine (MMR).

MMR is a live (weakened) vaccine so is not given during pregnancy.

### **Why do I need the MMR vaccination after pregnancy?**

This will protect you and your baby in any future pregnancy and give you longer term protection against measles, mumps and rubella. You will need two doses of the vaccine if you haven't had it before.

You will need these after your baby is born. You will be given the first vaccine usually at your doctor's surgery, and the second dose a month later.

You should avoid becoming pregnant for one month after the vaccinations, so you need to have a reliable method of contraception.

If you are not sure if you have had MMR vaccination, contact your GP surgery to check your immunisation records.

## **Other important information**

### **Can I breastfeed my baby following vaccination?**

Yes, it is safe to breastfeed your baby after you have had MMR, flu and whooping cough vaccinations. In fact, if you have the whooping cough vaccine while you are pregnant, your breast milk will have protective antibodies in it so you can continue to share your protection with your baby by breastfeeding.

## **Rash in pregnancy**

### **What should I do if I come in contact with someone with a rash, or if I have a rash?**

If you get a rash or come into contact with someone who has a rash while you are pregnant, telephone your midwife or doctor for advice. You may need to have tests to see if you have an infection.

**Get advice from your GP or midwife as soon as you can.**

**Avoid any antenatal clinic, maternity setting or other pregnant women until you have been assessed.**

## **Other vaccines to discuss with your midwife**

### **Hepatitis B**

At birth, babies born to mothers who have the hepatitis B infection should have hepatitis B vaccine as soon as they are born. Arrangements should be made with your GP for your baby to have a further three doses of vaccine and a blood test when he or she is one year old to test for infection.

### **Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG)**

Babies born to a parent (or who have a grandparent) from a country where tuberculosis (TB) is common, should have BCG vaccine to protect them from TB.

## Where can I get more information?

The routine immunisation schedule showing which immunisations are offered in Wales is available from [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/pdfs/RIS.pdf](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/pdfs/RIS.pdf)



If you have any questions or want more information, talk to your doctor, midwife or nurse or call NHS Direct Wales on **0845 4647** or visit [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/)



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This leaflet is produced by:

Public Health Division, Welsh Government and the Vaccine Preventable Disease Programme, Public Health Wales.

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
This document is also available in Welsh.

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Digital ISBN 978 1 4734 7336 2 Print ISBN 978 1 4734 7338 6