

Pregnancy and Immunisation

During pregnancy, changes to your immune system mean that you may be more at risk of some infections and illnesses which may be harmful to you and your baby. Immunisation can protect you and your baby against some of these infections. It is important that you discuss immunisation with your doctor or health care provider.

What vaccinations should I have before becoming pregnant?

Vaccinating prior to pregnancy will protect you and your baby from vaccine preventable infections both before and after birth. Women planning pregnancy should have their vaccination needs assessed as part of any pre-conception health check. In particular, consider vaccines for: hepatitis B, measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (chickenpox). If your vaccination history is uncertain, a blood test can be done to check your immunity to hepatitis B, measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox. It is recommended that you wait 28 days before becoming pregnant following the administration of a live viral vaccine such as measles, mumps, rubella and chicken pox. Your doctor or health care provider can advise you about these vaccinations.

What vaccinations should I have while I am pregnant?

Pregnant women are routinely recommended to receive Influenza vaccine and the Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis (dTpa) vaccine during each pregnancy. These vaccines are provided free to pregnant women.

Influenza

Influenza can cause serious illness and being pregnant increases the risk of severe complications for both you and your baby. Immunisation not only protects you but also your baby. Babies under 6 months are too young to be vaccinated themselves but are at high risk of serious complications if they catch the virus. The best way to protect your newborn baby against influenza is to get vaccinated during pregnancy.

Optimal protection against influenza occurs within the first three to four months following vaccination. The timing of vaccination should be considered in relation to the influenza season, which peaks between June and September, and vaccine availability. Vaccinating from April provides protection through the peak season, although the timing of vaccination depends on vaccine availability and the anticipated duration of immunity. Pregnant women should be vaccinated at any time during the year when the vaccine is available.

Pertussis (dTpa)

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a highly infectious respiratory illness. Newborn babies are particularly susceptible. Maternal vaccination during pregnancy is a protective measure until the newborn can be vaccinated at 6 weeks of age. This added benefit is due to direct passive protection of the newborn by transfer of high levels of pertussis antibodies from the vaccinated woman to the unborn baby through the placenta.

The pertussis vaccine (dTpa) is recommended for pregnant women between 20 and 32-weeks' gestation but can be given from 20 weeks gestation up until the baby is born.

Pertussis vaccination is recommended for adult household contacts and carers of the newborn baby if their last dose was more than 10 years ago.

Other vaccines

In addition to these vaccines, some other vaccines are safe during different stages of pregnancy. They may be recommended if you have particular health concerns, travelling overseas, or are exposed to a vaccine preventable disease. Your doctor may recommend other vaccines and will discuss these with you if necessary.

Pregnancy is also a good time for other household members including partners, grandparents and close family to review their own immunisation status and whether they require vaccination before your baby is born.

If you were unable to be vaccinated prior to, or during pregnancy, it is recommended you receive any necessary vaccines as soon as possible after your baby is born. Breast feeding mothers are still able to be vaccinated with most vaccines; however, there are some vaccines that should be avoided. Please discuss this with your doctor or health care provider.

Should my other children be vaccinated while I am pregnant?

You should continue routine vaccinations for your other children while you are pregnant as this will help reduce the risk of you, or your new baby catching these diseases.

Useful Links

ACT Immunisation Information: <https://health.act.gov.au/services/immunisation>

Australian Immunisation handbook: <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/>

ACT Immunisation Information Line: 02 5124 9800

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