

Vaccine safety in pregnancy

Flu and whooping cough vaccines are recommended and safe to give in pregnancy.

Extensive studies provide evidence of the safety and effectiveness of these vaccines during pregnancy for both the mother and her unborn baby.

Vaccines, like any other medication, can have side effects. Most reactions are mild, short lasting and do not require special treatment.

For further information and advice about immunisation and pregnancy, speak to your midwife, doctor or immunisation provider.

Alternatively visit the Immunisation and Pregnancy page on the SA Health website: www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation.

Reference:

Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI), Australian Immunisation Handbook, Australian Government Department of Health, Canberra, 2018 immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au

For more information

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Public I1, A1

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Immunisation and pregnancy



Government
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BEFORE PREGNANCY

When planning pregnancy and to help protect your baby, it is important to make sure you are up-to-date with your immunisations because some diseases can cause birth defects or miscarriage if contracted during pregnancy. Making sure you are up-to-date with your immunisations will help provide protection for both you and your baby, during and after pregnancy.

It is also important to remind family members and anyone who will be caring for your baby to talk to their doctor or immunisation provider to check that their immunisations are up-to-date, including flu and whooping cough.

Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR)

It is important to be protected against rubella (German measles) because if the disease is contracted when pregnant, it can cause serious birth defects.

To check if you are protected, speak to your doctor about having a blood test or two doses of the MMR vaccine. You should avoid getting pregnant for 28 days after having the MMR vaccine.

Chickenpox (varicella)

If pregnant women become infected with chickenpox they can become seriously ill and infection can cause birth defects or severe chickenpox in the newborn baby.

To check if you are protected against chickenpox, speak to your doctor about having a blood test or two doses of the chickenpox vaccine. You should avoid getting pregnant for 28 days after having the chickenpox vaccine.

Hepatitis B

Pregnant women who have hepatitis B infection can pass the virus to the newborn at or near the time of birth.

A blood test can check whether you are protected against the hepatitis B virus. If not, having the hepatitis B vaccine before becoming pregnant can offer protection.

Pneumococcal

Pneumococcal bacteria can cause a number of serious infections. People at higher risk, including smokers, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, or those with conditions such as diabetes or chronic heart, lung or kidney disease should talk to their doctor about pneumococcal vaccination.

DURING PREGNANCY

Whooping cough and flu vaccines are recommended in each pregnancy to protect both mother and baby.

Other vaccines are not routinely given during pregnancy unless you are at significant risk of disease. Speak to your doctor about this.

Flu (influenza)

Flu is a highly infectious viral illness which affects the nose and throat and may also affect the lungs. It spreads easily when an infected person talks, coughs or sneezes and from contact with contaminated objects.

Pregnant women are more likely to have severe illness from flu due to changes to their immune system during pregnancy. Complications of flu during pregnancy can include pneumonia, premature labour or stillbirth.

Young babies under 6 months of age are more likely to be hospitalised with flu than other age groups and can have severe complications such as pneumonia and even death.

Having the flu vaccine during your pregnancy is safe and is the best way to protect yourself and your baby. It also helps protect your baby in the first few months of life when they are most vulnerable and too young to be vaccinated themselves.

The flu vaccine can be given **at any stage** of your pregnancy.

Whooping Cough (pertussis)

Whooping cough is a serious infection and can easily spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

It affects the lungs and airways and can cause serious complications including brain damage, pneumonia and sometimes death, particularly in young infants.

Babies who are too young to be fully immunised have the highest risk of infection and severe illness. Over 50% of babies with whooping cough have been infected by their parents. Siblings and other household contacts can also spread the infection to babies.

Immunisation during pregnancy reduces infection in babies less than 3 months of age by over 90% and helps protect the mother from getting whooping cough and passing it to the new baby.

The vaccine is safe to give during your pregnancy and **is best given between 20 and 32 weeks** of each pregnancy to provide the most protection for each baby. By having the vaccine from 20 weeks, you can pass on protective antibodies through the placenta to protect your baby in the first few months of life while they are most vulnerable.

If you have not received the vaccine by 32 weeks, speak to your midwife, doctor or immunisation provider to receive the vaccine as soon as possible before delivery.

*The whooping cough and flu vaccines are free for all pregnant women.**

Talk to your midwife, doctor or immunisation provider about getting the free vaccines.

**Your doctor may charge a consultation fee*

