You can start protecting your baby from **whooping cough** before birth

Information for pregnant women

Whooping cough (sometimes called pertussis) is a serious disease that can cause babies to stop breathing. Unfortunately, babies must be 2 months old before they can start getting their whooping cough vaccine. The good news is you can avoid this gap in protection by getting the whooping cough vaccine (also called the Tdap shot because it protects against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis) in your third trimester, preferably between your 27th and 36th week of pregnancy. By getting vaccinated, you will pass antibodies to your baby so she is born with protection against whooping cough.

When you get the whooping cough vaccine during your 3rd trimester, your baby will be born with protection against whooping cough.

Why do I need to get a whooping cough vaccine while I am pregnant?

The whooping cough vaccine is recommended during your third trimester so that your body can create antibodies and pass them to your baby before birth. These antibodies will help protect your newborn right after birth and until your baby gets his own first whooping cough vaccine at 2 months of age. During the first few months of life, your baby is most vulnerable to serious complications from this disease.

Is this vaccine safe for me and my baby?

Yes. The whooping cough vaccine is very safe for you and your baby. The most common side effects are mild, like redness, swelling or pain where the shot is given in the arm. This should go away within a few days. You cannot get whooping cough from the vaccine. The vaccine does not contain any live bacteria.

Doctors and midwives who specialize in caring for pregnant women agree that the whooping cough vaccine is safe and important to get during the third trimester of each pregnancy. Getting the vaccine during pregnancy does not put you at increased risk for pregnancy complications like low birth weight or preterm delivery.

If I recently got this vaccine, why do I need to get it again?

The amount of antibodies in your body is highest about 2 weeks after getting the vaccine, but then starts to decrease over time. That is why the vaccine is recommended during every pregnancy – so that each of your babies gets the greatest number of protective antibodies from you and the best protection possible against this disease.

Are babies even getting whooping cough anymore in the United States?

Yes. In fact, babies are at greatest risk for getting whooping cough. We used to think of this as a disease of the past, but it's making a comeback. Recently, we saw the most cases we had seen in 60 years. Since 2010, we see between 10,000 and 50,000 cases of whooping cough each year in the United States. Cases, which include people of all ages, are reported in every state.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/whoopingcough

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Mom, only you can provide your newborn baby with the best protection possible against whooping cough.

You may have heard that your baby's father, grandparents, and others who will be in contact with your baby will need to get their whooping cough vaccine as well. This strategy of surrounding babies with protection against whooping cough is called "cocooning." However, cocooning might not be enough to prevent whooping cough illness and death. This is because cocooning does not provide any direct protection (antibodies) to your baby, and it can be difficult to make sure ***everyone*** *who is around your baby has gotten their whooping cough vaccine. Since cocooning does not completely protect babies from whooping cough, it is even more important that you get the vaccine while you are pregnant.*

How dangerous is whooping cough for babies?

Whooping cough is very serious for babies. Many babies with whooping cough don't cough at all. Instead it can cause them to stop breathing. About half of babies younger than 1 year old who get whooping cough are hospitalized. Since 2010, about 10 to 20 babies die from whooping cough each year in the United States. Most whooping cough deaths are among babies who are too young to be protected by their own vaccination.

How could my baby be exposed to whooping cough?

Whooping cough spreads from person to person when coughing or sneezing or when spending a lot of time near one another where you share breathing space, like when you hold your newborn on your chest. Some people with whooping cough may just have a mild cough or what seems like a common cold. Since symptoms can vary, children and adults may not know they have whooping cough and can end up spreading it to babies they are in close contact with.

Why is the vaccine recommended during pregnancy instead of in the hospital after my baby is born?

When you get the whooping cough vaccine during pregnancy, you will pass protective antibodies to your baby before birth, so both you and your baby have protection.

The whooping cough vaccine used to be recommended for women to get in the hospital after giving birth. This helped prevent moms from getting whooping cough and passing it on to their babies. Unfortunately, the babies did not benefit from the protective antibodies and could still get whooping cough from others.

Is it safe to breastfeed after getting the whooping cough vaccine?

Yes, in fact you can pass some whooping cough protection to your baby by breastfeeding. When you get a whooping cough vaccine during your pregnancy, you will have protective antibodies in your breast milk that you can share with your baby as soon as your milk comes in. However, your baby will not get protective antibodies immediately if you wait to get a whooping cough vaccine until after you give birth. This is because it takes about 2 weeks after getting vaccinated before your body develops antibodies.

Where can I go for more information?

Pregnancy and Whooping Cough website:
www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant

Immunization for Women website:
www.immunizationforwomen.org/immunization_facts/vaccine-preventable_diseases/pertussis

Vaccines during Pregnancy website:
www.midwife.org/omot-vaccines-during-pregnancy

American Academy of Family Physicians website:
www.aafp.org/patient-care/immunizations/disease-population.html

Tdap Vaccine Information Statement (VIS):
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/tdap.html

Ask your doctor or midwife about getting the **whooping cough vaccine** during your 3rd trimester.