
Immunisation and pregnancy

Summary

- Immunisation can protect you and your unborn baby against many infectious diseases.
- If you are planning to have a baby, try to have your routine vaccinations up to date before you become pregnant.
- All women should receive free influenza and whooping cough vaccines during every pregnancy.
- Talk to your doctor or midwife about which immunisations are recommended for you during your pregnancy.
- Serious side effects or allergic reactions to vaccines are rare.

Some infectious diseases can cause serious harm to pregnant women or their unborn babies. If you are planning to have a baby, try to get up to date with your routine immunisations before you become pregnant.

All women should receive influenza and whooping cough vaccines during every pregnancy.

Serious side effects or allergic reactions to vaccines are rare.

Risk of infectious diseases during pregnancy

Some diseases can harm you and your unborn baby if you become infected with them when you are pregnant.

Examples of infections that are harmful to pregnant women and unborn babies include:

- **rubella** – can cause defects in the baby's brain, heart, eyes and ears and increases the risk of miscarriage and stillbirth.
- **chickenpox** – can cause defects in the baby's brain, eyes, skin and limbs.
- **measles** – increases the risk of miscarriage, premature birth or stillbirth.
- **mumps** – increases the risk of miscarriage.
- **hepatitis B** – can cause acute hepatitis B infection that you can pass on to your baby during birth. Both you and your baby could then become 'carriers' of hepatitis B (if the virus is not cleared from the body)
- **influenza** – increases the risk of miscarriage, premature birth or stillbirth. Increases your risk of severe illness and death.
- **whooping cough** (also known as pertussis) – can cause pneumonia, seizures, encephalopathy and the death of the baby.

As well as being immunised, you can reduce your risk of catching infectious diseases during pregnancy by:

- washing your hands regularly
- avoiding international travel
- avoiding close contact with sick people.

Immunisation before pregnancy

If you are **planning for a baby**, preparations you can make include:

- Visit your doctor for a health check-up. The doctor will order a blood test to check your immunity to some diseases (including rubella, chickenpox and hepatitis B) to see if you are protected. Based on the results, the doctor may recommend vaccination.
- If you are not up to date with any of your routine immunisations, ask your doctor about catch-up doses.
- Ask anyone else living in your house to be up to date with their immunisations to reduce their risk of passing diseases on to you and your baby.

- Avoid getting pregnant for at least one month after having the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine or the chickenpox vaccine.

Immunisation during pregnancy

Having the influenza and whooping cough vaccines during pregnancy is the best way you can protect your unborn baby. When you are immunised, your antibodies transfer from you to your developing baby. They receive protection in the first months of life when they are too young to be vaccinated.

Influenza infection can cause serious complications in pregnant women that can affect the unborn baby. Whooping cough (pertussis) infection can cause serious complications in babies, including death. This is why it is recommended that you are immunised against whooping cough and influenza during every pregnancy.

Influenza immunisation is free and recommended at any time during pregnancy.

Whooping cough combination* vaccine is free for pregnant women from 20 weeks gestation during every pregnancy. It is recommended that pregnant women have the whooping cough combination vaccine between 20 and 32 weeks gestation, but it can be given up until delivery.

In Victoria, the whooping cough containing vaccine is also free for partners of women who are at least 28 weeks pregnant, if the partner has not received a whooping cough booster in the last 10 years.

There is no evidence that vaccination will harm your unborn baby.

[*Note: The whooping cough combination vaccine is known as the 'three-in-one dTpa vaccine'. It immunises you against whooping cough (also known as pertussis), diphtheria and tetanus.]

Immunisation after pregnancy

If you didn't get the chance to get all your routine immunisations up to date before becoming pregnant, see your doctor after you have given birth.

If you are fully immunised, it will:

- help protect your newborn against infection
- reduce the risk of illness and birth defects if you become pregnant in the future.

It is safe to be immunised while you are breastfeeding – it will not cause harm to your baby.

Immunisation from an early age is highly recommended for all Australian children. Having your baby immunised helps to protect them from the most serious childhood infections, some of which can cause death.

Read more about **childhood immunisation**, and the **National Immunisation Program Schedule**.

Immunisation and HALO

The immunisations you may need are decided by your health, age, lifestyle and occupation. Together, these factors are referred to as HALO.

Talk to your doctor or immunisation provider if you think you or someone in your care may need immunisation, based on their HALO. You can check your immunisation HALO using the **Immunisation for Life infographic**.

Where to get help

- Your GP (doctor) or **midwife**
- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- Your local government immunisation service – (visit **Know Your Council** to find your local government authority)
- **Maternal and Child Health Line** (24 hours) Tel. **13 22 29**
- **NURSE-ON-CALL** Tel. **1300 60 60 24** – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- **Immunisation Program**, Department of Health and Human Services, Victorian Government Tel. **1300 882 008**

- **National Immunisation Hotline** Tel. **1800 671 811**
- **Pharmacist**
- **Victorian vaccine safety service (SAEFVIC)** Tel. **1300 882 924** – the line is attended between 9 am and 4 pm and you can leave a message at all other times

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