
Immunisation and pregnancy

Summary

- Immunisation can protect a woman and her unborn baby against many infectious diseases.
 - Ideally, have your vaccinations up to date before you become pregnant.
 - The influenza vaccine can be given at any time during pregnancy and is free during pregnancy under the National Immunisation Program.
 - For most vaccines, immunisation is best avoided during pregnancy unless the woman and her unborn baby are at risk of an infectious disease.
 - Serious side effects or allergic reactions to vaccines are rare.
-

Immunisation can protect a pregnant woman and her unborn baby from infectious diseases. Some infectious diseases can cause serious harm to pregnant women or their unborn babies. Ideally, women would be up to date with their immunisations before they become pregnant and all women should receive influenza and whooping cough vaccines during every pregnancy.

Vaccines can protect against many infectious diseases such as chickenpox, influenza, measles, mumps, rubella (German measles), diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough (pertussis), pneumococcal disease and hepatitis B. Serious side effects or allergic reactions to vaccines are rare.

Risk of infectious diseases during pregnancy

If a pregnant woman becomes infected with some diseases, her unborn baby can be harmed. Newborn children can also be harmed if their mothers have an infection.

Examples of infections that are harmful to babies include:

- Rubella – can cause defects in the brain, heart, eyes and ears of the baby and increases the risk of miscarriage and stillbirth.
- Chickenpox – can cause defects in the brain, eyes, skin and limbs of the baby.
- 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 can be passed on to the baby during birth, and both mother and baby have the potential to become 'carriers' of hepatitis B (the virus is not cleared from the body).
- Influenza – increases the risk of miscarriage, premature birth or stillbirth and increases the risk of severe illness and death in the mother.
- Whooping cough (pertussis) – can cause pneumonia, seizures, encephalopathy and the death of the baby.

Immunisation before pregnancy

If you are planning on having a baby, preparations you can make include:

- visiting your doctor for a health check-up
- asking your doctor for a blood test to check your immunity if you are not sure which immunisations you've had. If your immunisation status for a particular disease remains unknown, your doctor will usually recommend that you are vaccinated
- making sure you are fully immunised against chickenpox, influenza, measles, mumps, rubella, diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough. If you are not up to date with any of these immunisations, your doctor can advise you about catch-up doses. Influenza vaccine is free and recommended to be given at any time during

pregnancy and whooping cough vaccine is recommended in every pregnancy in the third trimester, ideally between 28 and 32 weeks gestation and up until the birth of the baby.

- asking anyone else living in your house to be immunised to reduce the risk of diseases being passed to your newborn baby
- waiting to fall pregnant for at least one month after receiving live vaccines such as the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine or the chickenpox vaccine (check with your doctor about this).

Immunisation during pregnancy

Issues to consider with immunisation in pregnancy include:

- Influenza infection can cause serious complications in a pregnant woman, which may include the need for hospital treatment. Influenza immunisation is free and recommended at any time during pregnancy. There is no evidence that the vaccine will harm the unborn baby.
- A whooping cough combination vaccine including tetanus and diphtheria protection is recommended to be given in the third trimester of every pregnancy, ideally between 28 and 32 weeks gestation, but it can be given up until delivery. Vaccination during pregnancy has been shown to benefit the newborn by passing protection from the mother to the baby. Whooping cough infection can cause serious complications in a baby, which may include death.

In Victoria, the vaccine is free for:

- pregnant women from 28 weeks gestation during every pregnancy
- partners of women who are at least 28 weeks pregnant if the partner has not received a pertussis booster in the last ten years
- parents or guardians of babies born on or after 1 June 2015, if their baby is under six months of age and they have not received a pertussis booster in the last ten years.
- More information on this vaccine can be found on the Victorian Government, Department of Health & Human Services [website](#).

Apart from immunisation, a pregnant woman can help reduce her risk of catching infectious diseases by regular hand washing, avoiding international travel and avoiding close contact with sick people. Fever during pregnancy is a known cause of some birth defects.

Immunisation after pregnancy

In the first months of life, a baby is protected from some infections by antibodies transferred from the mother during pregnancy. When these antibodies wear off, the baby is at risk of serious infection. Breastfeeding mainly provides protection against germs in the faeces. While breastfeeding has many benefits, it does not provide immunity to your baby for vaccine-preventable illnesses like whooping cough and diphtheria.

Issues to consider after your baby is born include:

- After you have given birth, you will be asked to consent to your newborn child receiving the first dose of a vaccine to protect against hepatitis B.
- In Victoria, at two months (at the earliest from six weeks) of age, your baby can begin courses of routine childhood immunisations against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough (pertussis), polio, *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib), hepatitis B (six-in-one vaccine) as well as rotavirus and pneumococcal disease.
- In Victoria, after your baby is 12 months old, additional immunisations reduce the risk of meningococcal C, measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox.
- If you didn't update your immunisations before becoming pregnant, see your doctor now. If you are fully immunised, it will help protect your newborn against infection, and reduce the risk of illness and birth defects if you become pregnant later.
- Vaccines are safe for both mother and baby if the mother is immunised while breastfeeding.
- Most premature babies tolerate immunisations. Be advised by your doctor. In general, there is no need to delay the childhood vaccination schedule unless your baby is very unwell.

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 has health, age, lifestyle or occupation factors that could mean immunisation is necessary. You can check your immunisation HALO using the **Immunisation for Life infographic (pdf)** downloadable poster.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000)
- Emergency department of your nearest hospital
- Local government immunisation service
- Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hours) Tel. 132 229
- NURSE-ON-CALL Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Immunisation Section, Department of Health & Human Services, Victorian Government Tel. 1300 882 008
- National Immunisation Information Line Tel. 1800 671 811
- Pharmacist

Things to remember

- Immunisation can protect a woman and her unborn baby against many infectious diseases.
- If possible, check your vaccination status before you become pregnant.
- The influenza vaccine can be given at any time during pregnancy and is free during pregnancy under the National Immunisation Program.
- The whooping cough containing vaccine should be given in the third trimester of every pregnancy.
- Serious side effects or allergic reactions to vaccines are rare.

This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:

Department of Health and Human Services - RHP&R - Health Protection - Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Unit

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2017 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.