

# FAQs about Whooping Cough Vaccine

Whooping cough (pertussis) vaccine is the best protection you can provide your baby against whooping cough. This vaccine is also known as “Tdap.”

## What is whooping cough (pertussis)?

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a highly contagious bacterial infection that can cause severe coughing and trouble breathing. It can be serious for anyone, but life-threatening in newborns and young babies. The current recommendation for immunization of children against whooping cough begins at 2 months of age, but most deaths occur before this first dose.

## How can I protect my baby from whooping cough?

The best strategy to protect your baby from whooping cough is to get vaccinated with each and every pregnancy. When the adult whooping cough vaccine (Tdap) is given in pregnancy, the mother creates antibodies against whooping cough, which cross the placenta and help protect the newborn. The amount of antibodies against whooping cough decreases quickly in adults, which is why women should be vaccinated during every pregnancy, and not before pregnancy. Tdap is

preferred at 27-36 weeks to pass along high levels of antibodies. By breastfeeding, you may pass some antibodies you have made in response to the vaccine to your baby. When you get a whooping cough vaccine during your pregnancy, you will have antibodies in your breast milk that you can share with your baby as soon as your milk comes in. However, if you wait to get a whooping cough vaccine until after delivering your baby, then it will take 2 weeks for your body to create protective antibodies and pass them to your baby through your breast milk. You should also help protect your baby by making sure everyone who will come into close contact with your newborn is up-to-date with Tdap. This will limit baby’s exposure to others who may have come in contact with the disease or are not immune. Your baby should have his or her first children’s whooping cough vaccine (DTaP) at 2 months of age.

## How common is whooping cough in the United States?

In recent years the number of whooping cough cases in the United States has risen dramatically. In 2012, 48,277 cases were reported, which is a marked increase from the low of 1000 cases reported in the 1970s. The death toll in 2012 was 20 people, 15 of whom were children less than 3 months of age.

## Is whooping cough vaccine safe during pregnancy?

Yes, whooping cough vaccine is safe and recommended during pregnancy, but side effects can occur. Most side effects are mild or moderate, meaning they do not affect daily activities. Most women will have pain at the injection site. Experts have carefully reviewed Tdap safety data and have concluded that it is safe for pregnant women and their unborn babies. The chance of serious harm or severe side effects from the whooping cough vaccine is less than the complications from being infected with whooping cough. Also, you cannot get whooping cough from the vaccine since it does not contain any live bacteria.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

American College of Nurse-Midwives  
<http://ourmomentoftruth.midwife.org/OMOT-Vaccines-for-Women>  
[www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/rec-vac/pregnant.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/rec-vac/pregnant.html)  
[www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant](http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant)  
[www.soundsofpertussis.com](http://www.soundsofpertussis.com)

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**Be a SUPERMOM**  
*Getting vaccinated during pregnancy protects your baby from this life-threatening disease!*

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