



# PertussisVIP (Vaccination-In-Pregnancy)

## Why should I get vaccinated against pertussis during my pregnancy?

**Pertussis (whooping cough)** causes severe coughing spells, which can last for months and cause difficulty breathing, vomiting, and disturbed sleep.

- Pertussis can also lead to weight loss, incontinence and rib fractures. Up to 2 in 100 adolescents and 5 in 100 adults with pertussis are hospitalised or have complications, which could include pneumonia or death.
- Although pertussis can be serious in adults, it is most severe for babies who are too young to receive the vaccine themselves.
- Pertussis infection can be especially severe in infants under 12 months of age, causing breathing problems, pneumonia, and sometimes death.

Pertussis is caused by bacteria and is spread from person to person through secretions from coughing or sneezing.

Parents are a common source of whooping cough infection for children under 12 months old. Pertussis vaccination reduces your risk of catching whooping cough and passing it to your newborn baby.

Babies born to people who have had a pertussis vaccine in pregnancy have higher levels of antibodies against the disease than those who were not vaccinated. This is because the antibodies made in response to the vaccine are passed to the baby across the placenta soon after vaccination and until delivery. The antibodies passed during pregnancy can help protect the newborn during the first months of life when they are most vulnerable to severe pertussis infection and still too young to be vaccinated themselves.

In Australia, the pertussis vaccine includes other components. The tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis vaccine (dTpa) is given during pregnancy to help protect against these diseases.

**Tetanus** (lockjaw) is rare in Australia today. It can lead to tightening of muscles in the head and neck so you can't open your mouth, swallow, or sometimes even breathe.

Tetanus kills about one out of 50 people who are infected even after receiving the best medical care.

**Diphtheria** is also rare in Australia today. It can cause a thick coating at the back of the throat and can cause breathing problems, heart failure, paralysis, and death.

## When can I have my pertussis vaccine?

Pregnant people should get a dose of pertussis vaccine during the second or third trimester of every pregnancy (ideally between 20 and 32 weeks), to protect the newborn from pertussis. It is recommended that you receive this vaccine during every pregnancy because your antibody levels may decrease over time and not stay high enough to offer enough protection for future pregnancies.

The optimal time for pertussis vaccination in pregnancy is between mid-second trimester and early third trimester (between 20 and 32 weeks gestation). This is because:

- your body develops the highest amount of antibodies about 2 weeks after vaccination
- these antibodies are transferred to protect the baby at 30 weeks gestation onwards
- levels of pertussis antibodies that are likely to be protective are detected in infants born to mothers vaccinated in the second and third trimesters.

## Can everyone get the vaccine?

There are some people who should not get the vaccine. Tell the immunisation provider if you aren't feeling well on the day the vaccination is scheduled or if you have ever had:

- a life-threatening allergic reaction after a dose of any tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis vaccine, or if you have a severe allergy to any part of this vaccine
- any severe allergies
- coma or long repeated seizures within 7 days after a childhood dose of dTpa or a previous dose of dTpa
- seizures or another nervous system problem
- severe pain or swelling after any vaccine containing diphtheria, tetanus or pertussis
- a condition called Guillain Barré Syndrome (GBS).

## Are there any side effects?

With any medicine, including vaccines, there is a potential for side effects. These are usually mild and go away on their own. Serious reactions are possible but are rare. There is a very small chance of a vaccine causing a serious injury or death. However most people who get a dTpa vaccine do not have any problems with it.

The most common side effects of the dTpa vaccine do not affect daily activities and get better on their own in a few days. These include mild redness, swelling, pain, and tenderness where the injection is given (about one person in 10).

Other side effects include body-ache, fatigue, or mild fever. Headache, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach ache, and arm swelling have also been reported.

## What if there is a serious reaction?

### What should I look for?

Allergic reactions to vaccines are very rare. Estimated at fewer than one in a million doses, and usually occur within a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

Look for anything that concerns you, such as signs of a severe allergic reaction, very high fever, or unusual behaviour.

Signs of a severe allergic reaction can include hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, and weakness. These would usually start a few minutes to a few hours after the vaccination.

## Is this vaccine safe for me and my baby?

Large studies from the US and UK into pertussis vaccination during pregnancy have found no evidence of serious reactions. Vaccination in pregnancy is the only way to protect infants 5 months and younger.

It is safe to have the pertussis vaccine during pregnancy. It is also recommended and safe to have the influenza and COVID-19 vaccines. You can have these vaccines at the same time or at different visits.

The safety of vaccines is always being monitored.

For more information, visit:

AusVax Safety: [ausvaxsafety.org.au/safety-data/pregnant-women](https://ausvaxsafety.org.au/safety-data/pregnant-women)

Australian Department of Health: [campaigns.health.gov.au/immunisationfacts/are-vaccines-safe](https://campaigns.health.gov.au/immunisationfacts/are-vaccines-safe)

### What should I do?

Please call your immunisation provider if you have a reaction you think is serious or unexpected. Healthdirect is also available on 1800 022 222. For any severe reaction, call an ambulance or go to your closest emergency department.

Significant and unexpected reactions should be reported by your immunisation provider or by yourself to the Western Australian Vaccine Safety Surveillance (WAVSS) system:

Online portal at: [www.safevac.org.au/Home/Info/WA](https://www.safevac.org.au/Home/Info/WA)

Email: [wavss@health.wa.gov.au](mailto:wavss@health.wa.gov.au)

Phone: (08) 6456 0208

Name of vaccine recipient: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/20\_\_

Vaccinator's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Batch number: \_\_\_\_\_ (Apply sticker or write in)

Brand name:  Adacel  Boostrix  Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

You can access your immunisation history statement from Medicare or calling the Australian Immunisation Register.



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