

The whooping cough vaccination programme for pregnant women began in 2012 in response to an outbreak of whooping cough across the UK. The vaccine is given to pregnant women as they can pass antibodies to their babies to protect them in the first few weeks of life – when they are particularly vulnerable to infection. All women who are 16 weeks pregnant or more should be offered the vaccine by their GP.

The age at which pregnant women can be offered the vaccine was lowered from 28 weeks to 16 weeks gestation in May 2016 because of updated advice from the Joint Committee for Vaccines and Immunisation (JCVI).

Whooping cough is a disease that can cause long bouts of coughing and choking, which can make it hard to breathe. It can be very serious for young children and even fatal for babies under one year old.

Newborn babies are likely to have little or no natural protection against whooping cough until they have been fully vaccinated themselves. Vaccination of pregnant mothers helps protect children from birth until they are old enough to be vaccinated themselves. Vaccination of babies is routinely given at two, three and four months of age, with a booster administered three years later.

The vaccine given to pregnant women through this programme, called Boosterix-IPV®, also provides protection against diphtheria, tetanus and polio, in addition to whooping cough. There is no evidence that the use of this vaccine during pregnancy is unsafe for either the pregnant woman or her unborn baby. The vaccine is not live and cannot cause whooping cough. There may be some mild side effects from this vaccination, such as swelling, redness or tenderness, although serious side effects are extremely rare.

Whooping cough resources

Leaflet

Whooping cough

If you are pregnant you should get vaccinated to protect your baby



Public Health Agency

Poster

Whooping cough
Get the vaccine to protect your baby

You can help protect your baby from whooping cough by getting vaccinated from week 16 of your pregnancy.



For more information talk to your GP or visit www.publichealth.hscni.net

Public Health Agency

Pertussis immunisation for pregnant women

HSC Public Health Agency

Introduction

The routine childhood immunisation programme has been very effective in reducing the overall numbers of cases of pertussis. Before the introduction of routine immunisation against pertussis in the 1950s, large epidemics occurred every three to five years affecting up to 150,000 people and contributed to about 200 deaths each year in the UK. In comparison, over the last ten years (2002 to 2011) there have been on average 600 cases of pertussis with over 200 babies needing admission to hospital and four babies dying each year in England and Wales.

However, there was a considerable increase in pertussis activity across the UK starting in mid 2011. The national age for largest case in the UK for over a decade. In Northern Ireland 214 cases of confirmed pertussis were notified in 2012 compared to 15 the year before, and 31 of these were in babies aged under 3 months old. A programme was developed introduced to protect vulnerable babies from pertussis by offering vaccine to their mothers during pregnancy. In 2013, however, that deaths were reported in England and Wales from pertussis and all deaths occurred in infants who were born before the introduction of the pertussis vaccine programme for pregnant women. Up to 31 October 2014, 10 deaths were reported in infants with confirmed whooping cough who were born after the introduction of the national programme. Nine of these 10 infants were born to unvaccinated mothers and all 10 deaths were the young to have received their first dose of pertussis-containing vaccine and be fully protected.

by vaccination themselves. The vaccination programme has been successful in reducing the number of babies affected with pertussis before they are six months of age vaccinated, with less than 10 cases per year in Northern Ireland in babies under three months old in 2013 and 2014, however this did rise to 21 cases in 2015 and so vaccination should still be offered to all pregnant women for each pregnancy.

Young infants are particularly vulnerable to complications, hospitalisation and death from pertussis. Vaccinating pregnant women against pertussis should help provide their newborn babies with protection against serious complications from pertussis and they can receive their routine immunisations from two months of age. The leaflet provides information on the disease, the vaccine and immunisation programme and a section on frequently asked questions.

The disease

What is pertussis?

Pertussis is commonly known as whooping cough or a tickle caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Pertussis causes an irritating cough that often develops into prolonged bouts of coughing. In children, the bouts of coughing are commonly followed by a characteristic 'whoop' sound (heard in breath) and may be accompanied by vomiting. In adolescents and adults, the symptoms may only be a prolonged cough.

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