

# BCG

## and your baby

### Protecting babies against TB



## Immunisation

the safest way to protect your child

**This leaflet is about the BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guerin) vaccination that is being offered to protect your baby against tuberculosis (TB).**

### **What is BCG vaccine?**

BCG vaccine contains a weakened form of the bacteria (germs) that cause TB. Because it is weakened it doesn't actually cause TB, but it helps your baby develop protection (immunity) against the disease in case he or she ever comes into contact with it.

### **What is TB?**

TB is a serious infectious disease that can lead to TB meningitis (swelling of the lining of the brain) in babies. In young people and adults it usually affects the lungs, but it can also affect the glands, brain or bones. Treatment for TB takes several months. While most people in this country recover fully after treatment, TB meningitis can be fatal or cause severe disability.

### **How is TB caught?**

You can only catch TB from someone whose lungs or throat are already infected and who is coughing. When they cough, a spray of tiny droplets is

produced that contain the germs. If you breathe in the droplets you too can catch the disease. Although these droplets can stay in the air for quite long periods of time, in general, it takes close and lengthy contact with an infected person for the disease to spread.



## How common is TB?

In the UK in the 1950s, there were over 50,000 new cases of TB every year. Today, this number has dropped to about 8,000 new cases a year (of which approximately 65 are from Northern Ireland) but this is still an increase from around 5,500 new cases a year in the early 1990s. So, while it is unlikely that you will get infected, everybody should be aware of the symptoms of TB. This is especially important because TB is a widespread disease worldwide and is increasing in many areas (see pages 6 and 7). With greater numbers of people travelling around the world, the risk increases that people who have lived or worked in countries with high rates of TB will come into contact with the disease or bring it into this country.

## What are the symptoms of TB?

TB can affect practically any part of the body, so the symptoms vary and the signs of the disease in a baby may be different from those in an adult. However, as TB is infectious, it is important that you can recognise the disease in someone else. You should contact a doctor if your baby, or any other member of your family, or a friend has any of the following:

- a cough that lasts for more than three weeks
- a fever
- sweating, especially at night
- weight loss
- feeling tired
- coughing up blood.

## Why is my baby being offered BCG?

In the UK, like many other countries, BCG is offered to babies who are more likely than the general population to come into contact with someone with TB. This is because they either live in an area with high rates of TB or their parents or grandparents came from a country with high rates of TB (see pages 6 and 7). The vaccination is free and is usually offered after the birth either in hospital or when you return home.

## How is my baby immunised?

Your baby will be given the BCG vaccination in the upper part of the left arm.

## Are there any side effects?

Immediately after the injection, a raised blister will appear. This shows that the injection has been given properly.

Within two to six weeks of the injection, a small spot will appear. This may be quite sore for a few days, but it should gradually heal if you don't cover it. It may leave a small scar.

Occasionally, your baby may develop a shallow sore where they had the injection. If this is oozing fluid and needs to be covered, use a dry dressing – never a plaster – until a scab forms. This sore may take as long as several months to heal.

If you are worried or you think the sore has become infected, see your doctor or nurse.

Very rarely, a vaccine may cause an allergic reaction, such as a rash or itching affecting some or all of the body. Even more rarely, children may have a severe reaction to the immunisation, causing difficulty breathing and possibly collapse. This is called anaphylaxis. A recent study has shown that one case of anaphylaxis is reported in about half a million immunisations given. Although allergic reactions can be worrying, treatment leads to a rapid and full recovery.

## Are there any reasons why my baby shouldn't have the BCG vaccination?

The injection should not be given or should be delayed if your baby:

- has a high fever
- is having treatment for cancer or other serious conditions that weaken the immune system
- may be HIV positive (ie if the mother is HIV positive)
- is suffering from a generalised skin condition, eg eczema
- will be living in a household with someone with suspected or confirmed TB that hasn't yet been treated. In this case, the BCG vaccination may need to be postponed – this will be discussed with you.

## Do I need to know anything else?

Your baby can start their routine primary immunisations at two months of age regardless of when they have their BCG.

However, you should make sure that your baby is not given another injection in the same limb as the BCG for at least three months afterwards, otherwise the glands in that area may swell.

Also make sure that there is a record of the BCG vaccination in your child's Personal Child Health Record (PCHR) for future reference.

## How can I tell if my baby needs a BCG vaccination?

If you answer 'Yes' to any of these questions, your baby should have a BCG vaccination if he or she hasn't already had one.

- Is either of your baby's parents or any of the grandparents from a country with a high rate of TB (as listed on pages 6 and 7)?
- Will you and your baby be going to live for more than a month or travel frequently in one of these countries in the near future?
- Is there anyone in your house, or anyone else who is likely to have long-term close contact with your baby, who either has TB, or has had it in the past five years or comes from one of these countries?

## Can I request a BCG vaccination for myself or my children?

Only those individuals who have specific risk factors for TB (see above)

will be offered a BCG vaccination. You or your child will be assessed to see if you meet the criteria before being offered a vaccination.



## Countries with annual rates of TB of 40/100,000 of the population or greater

Afghanistan	Ecuador
Algeria	El Salvador
Angola	Equatorial Guinea
Armenia	Eritrea
Azerbaijan	Ethiopia
Bahrain	Gabon
Bangladesh	Gambia
Belarus	Georgia
Belize	Ghana
Benin	Guatemala
Bhutan	Guinea
Bolivia	Guinea-Bissau
Bosnia Herzegovina	Guyana
Botswana	Haiti
Brazil	Honduras
Brunei Darussalam	India
Bulgaria	Indonesia
Burkina Faso	Iraq
Burundi	Kazakhstan
Cambodia	Kenya
Cameroon	Kiribati
Cape Verde	Kyrgyzstan
Central African Republic	Lao People's Democratic Republic
Chad	Latvia
China	Lesotho
China, Hong Kong SAR	Liberia
China, Macao SAR	Lithuania
Colombia	
Comoros	
Congo	
Côte d'Ivoire	
Croatia	
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	
Democratic Republic of Congo	
Djibouti	
Dominican Republic	

Madagascar  
 Malawi  
 Malaysia  
 Maldives  
 Mali  
 Marshall Islands  
 Mauritania  
 Micronesia (Federated States of)  
 Mongolia  
 Morocco  
 Mozambique  
 Myanmar  
  
 Namibia  
 Nauru  
 Nepal  
 Nicaragua  
 Niger  
 Nigeria  
 Niue  
 Northern Mariana Islands  
  
 Pakistan  
 Palau  
 Panama  
 Papua New Guinea  
 Paraguay  
 Peru  
 Philippines  
  
 Qatar  
  
 Republic of Korea  
 Republic of Moldova  
 Romania  
 Russian Federation  
 Rwanda

Sao Tome and Principe  
 Saudi Arabia  
 Senegal  
 Sierra Leone  
 Solomon Islands  
 Somalia  
 South Africa  
 Sri Lanka  
 Sudan  
 Suriname  
 Swaziland  
  
 Tajikistan  
 Thailand  
 Timor-Leste  
 Togo  
 Tokelau  
 Turkmenistan  
 Tuvalu  
  
 Uganda  
 Ukraine  
 United Republic of Tanzania  
 Uzbekistan  
  
 Vanuatu  
 Venezuela  
 Viet Nam  
  
 Wallis and Futuna  
  
 Yemen  
  
 Zambia  
 Zimbabwe

Source: World Health Organization. Global tuberculosis control: surveillance, planning, financing. Geneva: WHO, 2008.

For an up-to-date list of countries with high rates of TB, check the website [www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb\\_C/1195733758290](http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1195733758290)

If you want more information on TB, or the BCG vaccine or any other immunisations, or if you want this leaflet in other languages, speak to your doctor, health visitor, midwife or nurse, or visit the DHSSPS website [www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/immunisation](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/immunisation). Additional information is available on [www.immunisation.nhs.uk](http://www.immunisation.nhs.uk)

**Remember, treating TB  
takes a long time,  
preventing it is much easier.**



**Health  
Promotion  
Agency**



**DHSSPS**

Department of Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety

[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk)

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