

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Immunization in Pregnancy

Get protected, get immunized.

- Immune globulins are passive immunization agents. This means they give quick, short-term protection.
- For long-term protection, you need a vaccine.

What is pertussis (whooping cough)?

Pertussis is an infection of the airways caused by bacteria. It is also called the “100 day cough” as coughing can last for months.

How is pertussis spread?

Pertussis is easily spread by coughing, sneezing, or having contact with someone who is infected. You can also get pertussis if you touch your eyes or nose after touching something that has the virus on it (such as toys or other things).

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Symptoms include:

- a mild (low) fever
- runny nose
- red, watery eyes
- a cough

The cough gets worse over time and may last for weeks or months. A coughing spell may cause you to choke, vomit (throw up), and have trouble eating, drinking, and breathing. Very young babies may not cough but the infection can cause them to stop breathing.

How serious is pertussis?

Pertussis can lead to an infection in the lungs (called pneumonia). In rare cases, it can cause seizures, brain injury, and death. Babies have the highest risk of having a serious pertussis infection.

In Canada, 1 to 4 people with pertussis die each year. These deaths happen most often in babies who are too young to be immunized or children who have not had all their immunizations.

Is pertussis in Alberta?

Yes, between 2019 and 2023, 1386 Albertans had pertussis. Of these, 148 were babies under 1 year of age.

See reverse for more information.

Is there a vaccine that protects you from pertussis?

Yes, the Tdap vaccine protects you from tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis.

Who should get a vaccine that protects against pertussis?

Everyone should get a vaccine that protects against pertussis.

Children get a vaccine that protects against pertussis as part of their routine immunizations at ages 2, 4, 6, and 18 months. They also get a follow-up (booster) dose at age 4 years and again in Grade 9.

Adults get a booster dose of Tdap every 10 years. If you are pregnant, you need a dose of Tdap each time you are pregnant (even if it has been less than 10 years since your last dose).

I am pregnant. Should I get immunized against pertussis?

Yes, it is important to get the Tdap vaccine to protect you and your baby from pertussis while you are pregnant. The protection you get from the vaccine also crosses the placenta. This will protect your baby from pertussis during their first few months of life.

The best time to get the Tdap vaccine is between 27 and 32 weeks of pregnancy. If you are outside of this time, talk to your healthcare provider about when to get the Tdap vaccine.

Is it safe to get the Tdap vaccine while pregnant?

Yes. The Tdap vaccine is safe for both you and your baby.

Where can I get the Tdap vaccine?

You can get the Tdap vaccine at your local public health or community health centre and pharmacies. Some doctor's offices also give the vaccine. Ask your healthcare provider where to get the vaccine. The Tdap vaccine is free of charge.

What else can I do to protect myself and my baby?

Make sure everyone around you is also immunized against pertussis, especially those who live in your home.

Are there other vaccines I should get while I am pregnant?

You should also get an influenza (flu) vaccine. You are at a higher risk for serious complications from influenza when you are pregnant. Influenza may also cause health problems for your baby.

For more information on influenza immunization in pregnancy, read the Alberta Health Services information sheet: [Influenza Immunization if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or have a newborn.](#)

I have a fear of needles. How can I prepare for my immunization?

Many adults and children are afraid of needles. There are things you can do before, during, and after immunization to be more comfortable.



Scan the QR code, visit ahs.ca/vaccinecomfort, or call Health Link at 811 for information.

For more information about immunization



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