



Protecting Against Pertussis With Tdap During Pregnancy

Quick Facts About Tdap During Pregnancy

- **Pertussis is a contagious disease** that causes a bad cough.
- **In babies, it can be very serious.** One-half of babies who get pertussis end up in the hospital.
- There is a vaccine for pertussis, but babies can't get it until they are 2 months old. **You can protect your newborn by getting vaccinated with the pertussis vaccine (Tdap) when you are pregnant.**
- To give your baby the best protection, **you need to get Tdap during each pregnancy.** The ideal time is between 27 and 36 weeks of pregnancy.
- **Tdap has been proven to be safe** during pregnancy. It does not cause birth defects or pregnancy problems.

What is pertussis?

- Ⓞ *Pertussis* is a disease that is caused by *bacteria*. It starts with cold-like symptoms and then causes a bad cough. Coughing fits can be so severe that it can be hard to catch your breath. You may make a whooping sound as you try to get air.
- Ⓞ Pertussis is very contagious. It is easily spread through the air when infected people cough.

What can happen if a baby gets pertussis?

- Ⓞ Babies, especially those younger than 1 year, can become very sick if they get pertussis. Instead of coughing, they may gasp, gag, or throw up. They can turn blue from lack of oxygen. Apnea (when a baby stops breathing for a short time) and seizures may occur.
- Ⓞ Some babies get *pneumonia* as a result of having pertussis. One-half need to go to the hospital. In the United States, a small number of infants die each year from pertussis.

Is there a vaccine to prevent pertussis?

- Ⓞ There are two vaccines for pertussis that are given at different ages and life situations, DTaP and Tdap.
- Ⓞ DTaP is given to babies and children. It protects against pertussis and two other serious diseases, *tetanus* and *diphtheria*. Babies get their first dose of DTaP at age months, and then 4 more doses at ages 4 months, 6 months, 15–18 months, and 4–6 years.
- Ⓞ A booster shot, called Tdap, is given at age 11–12 years.

- Ⓞ Adults older than age 19 who have never had Tdap should get it once during their lifetime. It can replace one of the tetanus booster shots (Td) that is given every 10 years.
- Ⓞ Pregnant women need to get Tdap during each pregnancy.

Why is getting vaccinated against pertussis with Tdap important during pregnancy?

Babies can't be vaccinated until they are 2 months old. They aren't protected against pertussis until they can get the vaccine. You can help protect your baby during this time by getting the vaccine during pregnancy.

Why do I need to get Tdap during each pregnancy?

- Ⓞ When you get Tdap, your body immediately starts making *antibodies*. These are the proteins made by your *immune system* that target pertussis if you are exposed to it.
- Ⓞ These antibodies cross the *placenta* and enter your fetus's bloodstream. When your baby is born, he or she will have enough antibodies to protect against pertussis until it's time to get the vaccine at age 2 months. Getting Tdap during every pregnancy boosts your antibodies so that the maximum amount can be transferred to your fetus.

When should I get Tdap during pregnancy?

The best time to get Tdap is between 27 and 36 weeks of pregnancy. It's recommended that you get it as early as possible within this time frame.

What if I don't get Tdap during my pregnancy?

You can get Tdap after pregnancy. Breastfeeding will transfer the antibodies you make after getting the vaccine to your baby. But it takes up to 2 weeks for your body to make the maximum amount of antibodies. During this time, your baby may not be fully protected against pertussis. That's why the best way to protect your baby is to get Tdap during each pregnancy.

Is the vaccine safe during pregnancy?

Yes. Tdap vaccination in pregnancy is very safe. Research done in the last 10 years has shown that getting the vaccine during pregnancy doesn't increase the risk of pregnancy problems or birth defects.

Who else in the household should get a Tdap vaccine?

All family members and caregivers who will have contact with your baby should also have had a Tdap booster vaccine. Even if they received a standard tetanus booster within the past 10 years, they should get the Tdap vaccination at least 2 to 3 weeks before the baby is born.

Are there side effects of the Tdap vaccine?

The vaccine has very few side effects. Pain and redness can occur where the injection is given. If any pain, redness, or swelling lasts beyond a few days, contact your health care provider.

Glossary

Antibodies: Proteins made by the immune system in response to a foreign substance, such as a virus.

Bacteria: A group of one-celled organisms (living things) that can live in soil, plants, animals, and the human body. Many can cause disease.

Diphtheria: A contagious disease that causes blockage of the nose and throat, making it hard to breathe.

Immune System: The cells and organs that protect the body against foreign substances, such as bacteria and viruses.

Pertussis: A contagious disease that causes severe coughing and is especially serious for babies younger than 1 year.

Placenta: A special organ made by a woman's body during pregnancy. It allows the transfer of nutrients, antibodies, and oxygen to the fetus from the woman. It also makes hormones that sustain the pregnancy.

Pneumonia: An infection of the air sacs in the lungs.

Seizures: A disturbance in the activity of the brain that can lead to changes in movement or behavior.

Tetanus: An often fatal disease that attacks the nerves that control muscles, especially those used for breathing.

Vaccine: A substance containing parts of an inactivated or killed version of a disease-causing agent that causes a person's immune system to make antibodies to fight the disease.

To find a maternal-fetal medicine subspecialist in your area, go to <https://www.smfm.org/members/search>.

The Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine's Patient Education Series reflects the content of current, published SMFM practice guidelines. Each series document has undergone extensive internal review prior to publication. Patient Education documents should not be used as a substitute for the advice and care of a medical professional.



Society for
Maternal-Fetal
Medicine
High-risk pregnancy experts