

# Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Immunization for Pregnant Women

## 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 an infected person. You can also get pertussis if you touch your eyes or nose after touching something that an infected person also touched (such as toys or other things).

## What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Symptoms include a mild fever, runny nose, red, watery eyes, and a cough. The cough gets worse over time and may last for weeks or months. A coughing spell may cause choking, vomiting, 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 (pneumonia), and in rare cases, seizures, brain injury, and death. Babies are at the highest risk of severe disease. In Canada, 1 to 4 deaths are related to pertussis each year. These deaths are most often in babies who are too young to be immunized or children who are not fully immunized.

## Is pertussis in Alberta?

Yes, between 2009 and 2018, 3700 Albertans had pertussis. Of these, 116 were babies under 3 months of age.

## Is there a vaccine that protects you from pertussis?

Yes, the dTap (diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis) vaccine protects you from diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis.

## Who should get a pertussis containing vaccine?

Everyone.

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

**Adults** get a booster dose of dTap every 10 years. If you are pregnant, you need a dose of dTap 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, getting the dTap vaccine protects you and your baby from pertussis while you are pregnant. The protection you get from the vaccine also crosses the placenta to protect your baby during their first few months of life. The best time to get the dTap vaccine is between 27 and 32 weeks of pregnancy. If you are outside of this time frame, talk to your healthcare provider about when to get the dTap vaccine.

## Is it safe to get the dTap vaccine while pregnant?

Yes. Studies show that dTap immunization is safe in pregnancy for both mother and baby.

## Where can I get the dTap vaccine?

You can get the dTap vaccine at public health offices and pharmacies. Some doctor's offices also give the vaccine. Ask your healthcare provider where to get the vaccine. The dTap vaccine is free.

### 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 be immunized against influenza. You are at 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 vaccine in pregnancy, read the Alberta Health Services information sheet: [Influenza Immunization for Pregnant Women, Breastfeeding Women, and Families with Newborns](#).

**Get immunized. Protect yourself. Protect your baby.**

### For More Information



Call Health Link at 811



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