

What is pertussis?

Pertussis (also called whooping cough) is a highly contagious disease that causes severe coughing and difficulty breathing. People with pertussis may make a “whooping” sound when they try to breathe and gasp for air.

Pertussis can affect people of all ages, and can be very serious, even deadly, for babies less than a year old. Babies younger than 3 months have the highest risk of severe disease and of dying from pertussis.

What is Tdap?

The tetanus toxoid, reduced diphtheria toxoid, and acellular pertussis (Tdap) vaccine is used to prevent three infections: 1) tetanus, 2) diphtheria, and 3) pertussis.

I am pregnant. Should I get a Tdap shot?

Yes. All pregnant women should get a Tdap shot between 27 and 36 weeks of pregnancy, as early in that window as possible. The Tdap shot is a safe and effective way to protect you and your baby from serious illness and complications of pertussis.

How does the Tdap shot work?

The shot helps your body make protective antibodies against pertussis. These antibodies are passed to your fetus and protect your baby until your baby begins to get vaccines against pertussis at 2 months of age.

Getting the shot early in the window of 27 to 36 weeks is best. This timing maximizes the antibodies present at birth and will provide the most protection to your newborn.

Is it safe to get the Tdap shot during pregnancy?

Yes. The shot is safe for pregnant women.

Can newborns be vaccinated against pertussis?

No. Newborns cannot start their vaccine series against pertussis until they are 2 months old. This is because the vaccine does not work in the first few weeks of life. This is one reason why newborns are at a high risk of getting pertussis and becoming very ill.

What else can I do to protect my newborn against pertussis?

Getting your Tdap shot during pregnancy is the most important step in protecting yourself and your baby against pertussis. It is also important that all family members and caregivers are up to date with their vaccines.

Adolescent family members or caregivers should receive the Tdap vaccine at age 11 to 12. If adult family members or caregivers have never had the Tdap vaccine, they should get it at least 2 weeks before having contact with your baby. This makes a safety “cocoon” of vaccinated caregivers around your baby.

I am breastfeeding my baby. Is it safe to get the Tdap shot?

Yes. The Tdap shot can be given safely to breastfeeding women if they did not get the Tdap shot during pregnancy and have never received the Tdap shot before. There may also be added benefit to your baby if you get the shot while breastfeeding.

I did not get my Tdap shot during pregnancy. Do I still need to get the vaccine?

If you have never had the Tdap vaccine as an adult, and you do not get the shot during pregnancy, be sure to get the vaccine right after you give birth, before you leave the hospital or birthing center. It will take about 2 weeks for your body to make protective antibodies in response to the vaccine. Once these antibodies are made, you are less likely to give pertussis to your baby. But remember, your newborn still will be at risk of catching pertussis from others. If you had a Tdap shot as an adolescent or adult but did not have one during your pregnancy, you do not need to get the vaccine after giving birth.

I got a Tdap shot during a past pregnancy. Do I need to get the shot again during this pregnancy?

Yes. All pregnant women should get a Tdap shot during each pregnancy between 27 and 36 weeks of pregnancy. Receiving the vaccine as early as possible during these weeks is best.

I got a Tdap shot early in this pregnancy. Do I need another shot between 27 and 36 weeks?

No. A Tdap shot later in the same pregnancy is not necessary if you received the Tdap shot before the 27th week of your current pregnancy.

Can I get Tdap at the same time as other shots?

Yes. You can get Tdap, flu, and COVID-19 shots in the same visit. Getting these vaccines at the same time is safe.

What is the difference between DTaP, Tdap, and Td?

Children receive the diphtheria and tetanus toxoids and acellular pertussis (DTaP) vaccine. Adolescents and adults are given the Tdap vaccine as a booster to the vaccines they had as children. Adults receive the tetanus and diphtheria (Td) vaccine every 10 years to protect against tetanus and diphtheria. The Td vaccine does not protect against pertussis.

RESOURCES

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)

www.acog.org/Vaccine-Resources

www.acog.org/programs/immunization-for-women

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/pertussis/index.html

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