

Vaccination before and during pregnancy

What you need to know

Some diseases are especially dangerous for you and your baby during pregnancy – when the immune system is generally weakened - or for your baby in its first weeks of life. Timely vaccination either before or during pregnancy is a safe and effective way to protect against the severe outcomes of several of these diseases.

Vaccination before pregnancy

Measles, mumps and rubella

- If infection with rubella occurs during pregnancy, the virus can pass to the unborn baby and cause birth defects such as hearing loss, heart defects, and cataracts. This is called congenital rubella syndrome.
- Infection with measles, mumps, or rubella during pregnancy may increase the chance of miscarriage and stillbirth.
- If you have never received the measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine or are not sure of your vaccination status, WHO recommends that you get vaccinated against these diseases before becoming pregnant.
- The MMR vaccine has been in use for over 50 years and is proven to be both safe and effective. As it contains an attenuated (weakened) version of the living viruses, there is a theoretical risk of infection to the baby if you are vaccinated while pregnant. As a precaution this vaccine should therefore not be given during pregnancy.

Vaccination during pregnancy

Pertussis (whooping cough) and tetanus

- Pertussis can be serious for any child, but very young infants are at greatest risk of severe complications, even death.
- Vaccination during pregnancy is a safe and effective way to protect your baby from pertussis.
- Even if you have previously been vaccinated against pertussis, WHO recommends vaccination with one dose of tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis vaccine (Tdap) during pregnancy - in the 2nd or 3rd trimester and preferably at least 15 days before the end of pregnancy.
- The immunity you develop from the vaccine will pass to your baby through the placenta. This passive immunity protects your baby during the first weeks of life until they are old enough to receive the vaccine at 6-8 weeks of age.
- The Tdap vaccine also provides protection against tetanus, which can be contracted by newborns if they have no passive immunity from their mother and they are delivered in unsanitary conditions.



Vaccination during pregnancy (continued)

Seasonal influenza

- You are at higher risk of developing severe disease and complications from influenza infection during pregnancy and up to 2 weeks after delivery of the baby.
- If you are pregnant during the flu season, influenza vaccination is a safe and effective way to prevent infection. Immunity is also transferred to the baby offering some protection during its first weeks of life.
- Inactivated influenza vaccines have been administered to pregnant women for the past 50 years, with no evidence of any associated adverse effects in either the women or their newborn babies. Live attenuated influenza vaccines are not recommended during pregnancy.

COVID-19

- COVID-19 infection during pregnancy also poses a higher risk of severe illness for you and premature birth for your baby.
- COVID-19 vaccines are safe and offer strong protection against these severe outcomes.
- None of the COVID-19 vaccines contain the live virus that causes COVID-19, so they cannot cause the infection for you or your baby.



Resources

- [Pertussis vaccines: WHO position paper – August 2015](#)
- [Tetanus vaccines: WHO position paper – February 2017](#)
- [Vaccines against influenza: WHO position paper – May 2022](#)
- [Rubella vaccines: WHO position paper - July 2020](#)
- [Questions and Answers: COVID-19 vaccines and pregnancy 15 February 2022](#)