

## Preventing Whooping Cough in Pregnancy

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a highly contagious respiratory disease. It is caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*.

Pertussis can affect people of all ages, but can be very serious, even deadly, for babies less than a year old. Pertussis is known for uncontrollable, violent coughing which often makes it hard to breathe. The disease usually starts with cold-like symptoms and maybe a mild cough or fever. In babies, the cough can be minimal or not even there. Babies may have a symptom known as “apnea.” Apnea is a pause in the child’s breathing pattern. Pertussis is most dangerous for babies. About half of babies younger than 1 year who get the disease need care in the hospital



**The best way to protect against pertussis is by getting vaccinated.**

You need the whooping cough vaccine during *each* of your pregnancies

The amount of whooping cough antibodies in your body decreases over time. For this reason, The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that pregnant women receive the whooping cough vaccine for adolescents and adults (called Tdap vaccine) during the third trimester of *each* pregnancy. Your protective antibodies are at their highest about 2 weeks after getting the vaccine, but it takes time to pass them to your baby. The recommended time to get the shot is during 27<sup>th</sup> through 36<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy, preferably during the earlier part of this time period.

A recent study looked to see how effective Tdap was at preventing whooping cough in babies whose mothers got the vaccine while pregnant or in the hospital after giving birth. The study found that getting Tdap between 27 through 36 weeks of pregnancy is 85% more effective at preventing whooping cough in babies younger than 2 months old.



**You should get the whooping cough vaccine while pregnant to pass protection to your baby**

After receiving the whooping cough vaccine, your body will create protective antibodies (proteins produced by the body to fight off diseases) and pass some of them to your baby before birth. These antibodies provide your baby some short-term protection against whooping cough in early life. These antibodies can also protect your baby from some of the more serious complications that come along with whooping cough.

So the preferred time to get the whooping cough vaccine is early in your third trimester.

By breastfeeding, you may pass some antibodies you have made in response to the vaccine to your baby. When you get a whooping cough vaccine during your pregnancy, you will have antibodies in your breast milk that you can share with your baby as soon as your milk comes in. However, your baby will not get protective antibodies immediately if you wait to get the whooping cough vaccine until after delivering your baby. This is because it takes about 2 weeks for your body to create antibodies.

*Content source: National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, Division of Bacterial Disease*