

A guide to vaccination for pregnant women



During pregnancy, changes take place in your immune system which may make you more susceptible to some infections. Vaccination can help prevent disease or make the illness less serious.

Some vaccinations are recommended in pregnancy but the decision as to whether you have these is your choice. In Northern Ireland, the Health and Social Care (HSC) system provides vaccinations free of charge if you are registered with a General Practitioner (GP).

What vaccinations are offered during pregnancy?

- Whooping cough (pertussis)
- Influenza (flu)
- RSV (Respiratory Syncytial Virus)
- COVID-19

Why do I need these vaccines?

Whooping cough

Whooping cough is a serious infection that causes long bouts of coughing, making it hard to breathe. Young babies are most at risk from whooping cough. It can lead to pneumonia and permanent brain damage. The whooping cough vaccine helps you produce antibodies which will pass to your baby protecting them in the first few weeks of life until they are old enough to have their own vaccines at two, three and four months old. Whooping cough vaccine is not a live vaccine so it cannot cause whooping cough in you or your baby. All women who are 16 weeks pregnant or more will be offered this vaccine. The vaccine will be offered each time you become pregnant.

Flu

Flu is a highly infectious virus that occurs every year especially over the winter. Pregnant women are more likely to develop serious complications such as pneumonia which may require hospitalisation. Taking the flu vaccine during pregnancy allows antibodies to pass from you to your baby, protecting you both. Young babies are more at risk of becoming seriously ill if they catch flu because their immune system is not fully developed and they are too young to be offered the flu vaccine. It is a non-live vaccine and is offered over the flu season which normally starts at the end of September. If you become pregnant later in the winter, you should be offered a flu vaccine as soon as you know you are pregnant.

RSV

If you are pregnant, you can get a vaccine in each pregnancy to protect your baby against respiratory syncytial virus (RSV). RSV is a common virus that can cause a lung infection called bronchiolitis. Infants with severe bronchiolitis may need intensive care and the infection can be fatal. RSV is more likely to be serious in very young and premature babies and those with conditions that affect their heart, breathing or immune system.

RSV spreads easily. The best way to protect your newborn baby against RSV infection is for you to have the vaccine around 28 weeks of pregnancy.



COVID-19

COVID-19 is a relatively new virus that can cause severe illness in pregnancy, potentially leading to hospital admission or premature birth. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has identified pregnant women as a clinical risk group within the COVID-19 vaccination programme. Pregnant women are at more risk of becoming unwell from COVID-19 compared to non-pregnant women of the same age and are at higher risk if they have an underlying health condition such as immune problems, diabetes, high blood pressure or asthma; are overweight; are over the age of 35; or are in the third trimester of pregnancy (over 28 weeks).

The COVID-19 vaccine, which is a non-live vaccine like whooping cough and flu, is being offered to all pregnant women and can be given at any stage of pregnancy. Even if you have already had one or two doses and a booster of COVID-19 vaccine or have had the virus, you should have a further booster vaccination. This will help to keep you and your baby safe, especially over the winter months when infection rates are expected to increase. The vaccine will help protect your unborn baby as immunity will pass to them and offer short-term protection after birth.

The COVID-19 vaccine can be given alongside the flu vaccine, or it can be given separately if you prefer.

“ *Research from 16 studies in five countries involving more than 185,000 people who are pregnant, shows that having the [COVID-19] vaccines does not increase the risk of miscarriage, preterm birth or stillbirth.* ”

Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists, May 2022.

More information

For further information on where you can get these vaccines please ask your midwife or GP.

More information on the vaccines can be obtained by scanning the QR codes below.



Whooping cough

This leaflet provides information on whooping cough vaccination during pregnancy.

www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/whooping-cough-pertussis-immunisation-leaflet



Flu

This leaflet provides information on flu vaccination during pregnancy.

www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/flu-more-serious-you-think-pregnant-women-english-and-10-translations



RSV

The best time to get your RSV vaccine is around 28 weeks. For more information, see the leaflet How to protect your baby from RSV

<https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/RSV-pregnancy>



COVID-19

You are entitled to get a COVID-19 vaccination and booster doses during your pregnancy.

For more on the COVID-19 vaccination programme in Northern Ireland, see this link for information leaflets.

www.pha.site/COVID19infomaterials





COVID-19 decision making tool and Q&As

The Royal College of obstetricians and gynaecologists Information aid and decision-making tool has been developed for pregnant women to help make an informed choice on your COVID-19 vaccination.

The link also provides further information and Q&As on COVID-19 vaccines, pregnancy, fertility and breastfeeding.
www.rcog.org.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-pregnancy-and-women-s-health/vaccination/



Routine immunisation for your child

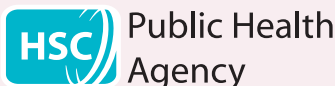
To give your child the best start in life, there is a routine childhood immunisation programme beginning with babies aged 2 months old protecting your child from deadly disease and any long-term health effects. You can ask your midwife, GP, practice nurse or health visitor for more information and how you or your family can catch up on any vaccinations.

The link provides information on the routine vaccinations given in Northern Ireland and how you or your family can catch up on any vaccinations.
<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/childhood-immunisation-programme>



ReachDeck translation service

ReachDeck allows you to translate information on the Public Health Agency website into other languages. Instructions are available in a number of languages.
www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/how-translate-information-pha-website-using-reachdeck



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