



The American College of  
Obstetricians and Gynecologists  
WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE PHYSICIANS



# Frequently Asked Questions for Pregnant Women Concerning Tdap Vaccination

## What is pertussis (whooping cough)?

Pertussis (also called whooping cough) is a highly contagious disease that causes severe coughing. People with pertussis may make a “whooping” sound when they try to breathe and gasp for air. In newborns (birth to 1 month), pertussis can be life threatening. Recent outbreaks have shown that infants younger than 3 months are at very high risk of severe infection.

## 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 in the third trimester, preferably between 27 weeks and 36 weeks of pregnancy. The Tdap shot is an effective and safe way to protect you and your baby from serious illness and complications of pertussis. You should get a Tdap shot during each pregnancy.

## Is it safe to get the Tdap shot during pregnancy?

Yes. There are no theoretical or proven concerns about the safety of the Tdap vaccine (or other inactivated vaccines like Tdap) during pregnancy. The shot is safe when given to pregnant women.

## During which trimester is it safe to get a Tdap shot?

It is safe to get the Tdap shot during all three trimesters of pregnancy. Experts recommend that you get Tdap during the third trimester (preferably between 27 weeks and 36 weeks of pregnancy). This gives your newborn the most protection. The shot causes you to make antibodies against pertussis. These antibodies are passed to the fetus. They protect your newborn until he or she begins to get vaccines against pertussis at 2 months of age.

## Can newborns be vaccinated against pertussis?

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

## What else can I do to protect my baby against pertussis?

Getting your Tdap shot is the most important step in protecting yourself and your baby against pertussis. It also is important that all family members and caregivers are up-to-date with their vaccines. If they need the Tdap shot, they should get it at least 2 weeks before having contact with your newborn. This makes a safety “cocoon” of vaccinated caregivers around your baby.

*(see reverse)*

### **I am breastfeeding my baby. Is it safe to get the Tdap vaccine?**

Yes. The Tdap shot can safely be given to breastfeeding women if they did not get the Tdap shot during pregnancy and have never received the Tdap shot before.

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

If you have never gotten the Tdap vaccine 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 newborn. But remember, your baby still will be at risk of catching whooping cough from others.

### **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, preferably between 27 weeks and 36 weeks of pregnancy. This time frame is recommended because it gives the most protection to the pregnant woman and the fetus. It appears to maximize the antibodies present in the newborn at birth.

### **I received a Tdap shot early in this pregnancy, before 27–36 weeks of pregnancy. Do I need to get another Tdap shot between 27 weeks and 36 weeks of pregnancy?**

A pregnant woman does not need to get the Tdap shot later in the same pregnancy if she got the shot in the first or second trimester.

### **Can I get the Tdap vaccine and flu vaccine at the same time?**

Yes. You can get more than one vaccine in the same visit.

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

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

Uppercase letters in these abbreviations mean full-strength doses of diphtheria (D) and tetanus (T) toxoids and pertussis (P) are used in the vaccine. Lowercase “d” and “p” mean reduced doses of diphtheria and pertussis are used in the vaccines for teenagers and adults. The “a” in DTaP and Tdap stands for “acellular,” meaning that the pertussis component contains only a part of the pertussis organism.

## **RESOURCES**

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists

[www.acog.org](http://www.acog.org)

Immunization for Women

[www.immunizationforwomen.org](http://www.immunizationforwomen.org)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/tetanus/default.htm>

Society for Maternal–Fetal Medicine

[www.smfm.org](http://www.smfm.org)