



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

Frequently Asked Questions for Pregnant Women Concerning Tdap Vaccination

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. In recent outbreaks, babies younger than 3 months have had 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 in the third trimester, preferably between 27 weeks and 36 weeks of gestation. The Tdap shot is a safe and effective way to protect you and your baby from serious illness and complications of pertussis.

When should I get the Tdap shot?

Experts recommend that you get the Tdap shot during the third trimester (preferably between 27 weeks and 36 weeks) of every pregnancy. The shot will help you make protective antibodies against pertussis. These antibodies are passed to your fetus and protect your baby until he or she begins to get vaccines against pertussis at 2 months of age. Receiving the shot early in the 27–36-weeks-of-gestation window is best because it maximizes the antibodies present at birth and will provide the most protection to the 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 of age 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 also is 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 11–12 years of age. If an adult (older than 18 years) family member or caregiver has never received the Tdap vaccine, he or she 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 also may be added benefit to your baby if you get the shot while breastfeeding.

(see reverse)

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 received a Tdap vaccination as an adolescent or adult but did not receive one during your pregnancy, you do not need to receive the vaccination 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, preferably between 27 weeks and 36 weeks of gestation. Receiving the vaccine as early as possible in the 27–36-weeks-of-gestation window is best. This is important to make sure that each newborn receives the highest possible protection against pertussis at birth.

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

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 the Tdap shot and influenza shot at the same time?

Yes. You can get these two shots, Tdap and influenza, in the same visit. Receiving these vaccinations 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

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
www.acog.org

Immunization for Women
www.immunizationforwomen.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/pertussis/index.html>

Society for Maternal–Fetal Medicine
www.smfm.org

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