

Frequently Asked Questions for Patients 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 are gasping for air. In newborns (birth to 1 month), pertussis can be a life-threatening illness. Multiple recent outbreaks have demonstrated that infants who are younger than 3 months are at a very high risk of severe infection.

What is Tdap?

Tetanus toxoid, reduced diphtheria toxoid, and acellular pertussis (Tdap) vaccine is used to prevent three infections: tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis.

I am pregnant. Should I get a Tdap shot?

Yes. All pregnant women should receive a Tdap vaccine preferably between 27 weeks and 36 weeks of gestation. The Tdap vaccine is an effective and safe way to protect you and your baby from serious illness and complications of pertussis. The Tdap vaccine should be administered during each pregnancy.

Is it safe to receive 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 available data demonstrate that the vaccine is safe when given to pregnant women or women in the postpartum period.

During which trimester is it safe to receive a Tdap shot?

It is safe to get the Tdap vaccine during all trimesters of pregnancy. Experts recommend that Tdap be administered to you during the third trimester of your pregnancy (ideally between 27 weeks and 36 weeks of gestation) to maximize the protection of your newborn. The newborn protection occurs because the protective antibodies you make after being vaccinated are transferred to the fetus and protect your newborn until he or she begins to receive the vaccines against pertussis (at 2 months of age).

Can newborns be vaccinated against pertussis?

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

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 is also important to make sure all family members and caregivers are up to date with their vaccines and, if necessary, that they receive the Tdap vaccination at least 2 weeks before having contact with your baby. This creates a safety “cocoon” of vaccinated caregivers around your baby.

I am breastfeeding my baby. Is it safe to get vaccinated with Tdap?

Yes. The Tdap vaccine can safely be given to breastfeeding mothers if they have not been previously vaccinated with Tdap.

I got my Tdap shot with my previous pregnancy. Do I need to be vaccinated with Tdap again in this pregnancy?

Yes. All pregnant women should be vaccinated with Tdap during each pregnancy preferably between 27 weeks and 36 weeks of gestation. This time frame is recommended in order to generate the most protection for the mother and fetus because this appears to maximize the antibodies in the newborn at birth.