

# Immunise during **Pregnancy**

Protecting baby and you from  
whooping cough and influenza



***immunise***

their best protection

**This leaflet is for pregnant women and their families. It explains the immunisations recommended to protect mum and baby against serious diseases such as whooping cough and influenza.**

**Free**  
immunisations  
against  
whooping cough  
and influenza

## **What is whooping cough?**

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a serious disease that is easily spread by coughing and sneezing.

Whooping cough immunisation is recommended in each pregnancy as protection can wear off over time



## How serious is it?

Whooping cough can be very upsetting for you and your baby. It can cause severe coughing attacks and may lead to serious complications, like pneumonia and brain damage.



It starts just like a common cold – runny nose, sneezing, slight fever and a mild irritating cough. The coughing attacks get worse and can be followed by a gasping breath or a ‘whoop’, and sometimes vomiting. The cough can last for up to 3 months.

  
**800+**

**75%**  


**3 died**

**Fact:** Over 800 babies caught whooping cough in the 2010–2013 outbreak in New Zealand. Of these, 75% needed hospital treatment. Two babies and one 3-year-old died.

## Who is most at risk?

Whooping cough is worse for babies under 1 year old. They are often unable to feed or breathe properly so become very ill and may need hospital treatment. In some cases, babies can die.

Babies who are not yet immunised are at greatest risk.

Remember baby's first immunisations at **6 weeks**

# What is influenza?

**Influenza or 'the flu' is not a cold.** Symptoms are usually much more severe, and include a cough, headache, fever or chills, body aches and pains, fatigue and generally feeling miserable.

Influenza can pose a serious risk to your life and that of your unborn baby.



## How serious is it?

Pregnant women and their unborn babies are most at risk of serious complications from influenza. It can lead to early birth, miscarriage, stillbirth, and lower birth weights.

 **x 500** **Fact:** Every year around 500 New Zealanders die from influenza.

Changes in the immune system, heart and lungs during pregnancy make pregnant women more at risk of serious influenza complications.

Pregnant women are nearly 5 times more likely to be hospitalised with influenza than women who are not pregnant.

**5x**  **Fact:** New Zealand pregnant women are five times more likely to be admitted to hospital for influenza-related complications than women who are not pregnant.

# How can I protect my baby and myself from these diseases?

**Immunisation is the best way to protect your baby and yourself against whooping cough and influenza.**

**Immunising against whooping cough** is recommended during pregnancy so you can pass on your immunity to your baby before they are born. This helps to protect baby until they have their first immunisations at 6 weeks.

**Immunising against influenza** is recommended during pregnancy to protect you from serious illness that could affect your baby. The best time to get vaccinated is in autumn, before the winter peak of influenza.

The vaccines are safe for use in pregnancy. The vaccine itself doesn't get passed on to your baby, but the antibodies you produce in response to the vaccine do.



## How effective are the vaccines?

**Immunising against whooping cough** during pregnancy is very effective at protecting babies before they can be immunised themselves.



**Fact:** About 90% of babies whose mothers are immunised against whooping cough during pregnancy will be protected during their first few weeks of life.

Protection wears off over time. People can get whooping cough some years later, even if they've been immunised or have had it before. This is why **immunising against whooping cough is recommended during each pregnancy.**

**Immunisation against influenza** is effective in preventing most influenza A and B strains in healthy adults when there is a good match between vaccine and circulating influenza strains.



## After baby is born

After your baby is born, get them immunised at the recommended times to protect against whooping cough and several other serious diseases.



Delaying immunisation puts your baby at greater risk of catching preventable diseases when they're most vulnerable to severe illness.

While not routinely recommended for all babies, influenza immunisation is available for purchase for babies from age 6 months onwards. It's free for babies and children with a history of significant respiratory illness and some other serious health conditions.

Talk to your doctor if you think this might apply to your child. Ask your doctor about any other available immunisations that can help protect your child.

## Other ways to protect your baby

- Adults in close contact with babies are recommended to be immunised against whooping cough.
- Keep babies away from anyone with a cough, even if they and baby are fully immunised.
- Enrol your baby at a general practice as soon as they're born to make sure they get the care they need on time.

## Protect your baby

- 1. Enrol with a midwife and general practice** – as soon as you know you're pregnant
- 2. Get immunised during pregnancy** – against whooping cough and influenza
- 3. Immunise baby on time** – at 6 weeks, 3 months and 5 months
- 4. Free immunisations for pregnant women and babies** – see the National Immunisation Schedule

### Where can I get more information?

- Talk to your midwife, nurse or doctor
- Call **Healthline 24/7** on **0800 611 116** or call **0800 IMMUNE** (466 863) 9:00am to 4:30pm, Mon-Fri.
- Visit: [health.govt.nz/immunisation](https://health.govt.nz/immunisation)

This resource is available from [health.govt.nz](https://health.govt.nz) or the Authorised Provider at your DHB. Revised March 2020. 04/2020. **HE2503**



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