

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT Vaccines During Pregnancy

Vaccination during pregnancy helps protect both you and your baby when you are most vulnerable to illness. Still, many people may have questions about how to keep their growing families healthy. Here are answers to some of your most pressing questions.

Answers written by experts at the Yale School of Public Health: Sydney Perlotto, MPH '24, Sasha Yeskel, MPH '27, Olivia Kachingwe, PhD, MPH, and Jason L. Schwartz, PhD; and the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases: Kevin Ault, MD.



Why are four vaccines recommended during pregnancy?

Changes to your body during pregnancy can put you at a **higher risk for severe impacts of certain infectious diseases, even if you are young and healthy.** Vaccination against four respiratory diseases (flu, whooping cough, COVID-19, and RSV) is one of the best ways you can protect yourself and your baby during pregnancy, with **benefits that last well into the first days and weeks of your newborn's life.**

How do we know these vaccines are safe for both me and my baby?

Vaccines undergo extensive research, review, and testing. Once approved, they are **continuously monitored for safety to help identify even very rare side effects.** Mild discomfort like a sore arm or feeling tired after vaccination is a sign that your immune system is working to build protection. Severe complications from respiratory diseases far outweigh any temporary vaccine side effects.

Hundreds of millions of pregnant people have received vaccines for decades, with families and experts working together to make safety the top priority.

The last time I got vaccinated, I still got sick. Why should I get vaccinated now?

Human bodies and infectious diseases are complex, so many vaccines cannot guarantee 100% protection. **This doesn't mean that vaccines aren't important and lifesaving;** they can make symptoms of illness milder, lower or eliminate the risk of serious harm for you and your baby, and protect other family members.

Layering other protective measures, like handwashing with soap and wearing quality masks, alongside vaccination further increases protection against respiratory diseases.

My clinician recommended that people I regularly see also get vaccinated before the baby is born. Why?

Your clinician is talking about **cocooning.** Think of cocooning like **an invisible bubble of protection.** When someone is more vulnerable to infectious diseases (like pregnant people and newborns), everyone in close contact can get vaccinated to help strengthen this protective bubble. Having partners, grandparents, siblings, babysitters, friends, and others up to date on their immunizations makes them less likely to spread respiratory illnesses to mom and baby.

Which vaccines are recommended during pregnancy?

	Flu vaccine	Tdap vaccine	COVID-19 vaccine	RSV vaccine
Vaccine-preventable disease	Seasonal influenza (flu)	Pertussis (whooping cough)	COVID-19	Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)
Recommended vaccine timing*	Any week of pregnancy	27 – 36 weeks of pregnancy	Any week of pregnancy	32 – 36 weeks of pregnancy
Vaccine primarily helps protect	You and your newborn	Your newborn	You and your newborn	Your newborn
Possible vaccine side effects**	Injection site redness/swelling/soreness, headache, fever, fatigue, nausea, muscle aches	Injection site redness/swelling/pain, headache, fever, fatigue, vomiting, diarrhea, stomachache	Injection site redness/swelling/pain, headache, fever, tiredness, nausea, muscle pain, or chills	Injection site pain, headache, nausea, muscle pain
Disease complications for newborns	Life-threatening, risk of hospitalization	Life-threatening, risk of violent coughing fits, strain on lungs and heart, and brain damage from lack of oxygen	Life-threatening, risk of fever, vomiting, diarrhea, trouble breathing, high fevers, and difficulty feeding	Life-threatening, risk of hospitalization, bronchitis, wheezing, difficulty feeding, and trouble breathing
Disease complications during pregnancy	Life-threatening, risk of hospitalization and severe pneumonia, strain on heart and lungs, preterm labor, and birth defects	Risk of severe bronchitis (inflammation of airways)	Life-threatening, risk of hospitalization, preeclampsia (dangerously high blood pressure), stillbirth, preterm delivery, and developmental delays	Risk of sinus and lung infections

Your clinician may recommend other vaccinations depending on your individual medical history and other risk factors. The four vaccines can be administered together in one trip to the doctor’s office or pharmacy, or they can be received separately based on your preferences. **Every pregnancy provides a new opportunity to get vaccinated to protect both yourself and your baby.**

*Especially from fall to early spring when respiratory infections tend to rise.

**As with any medicine, talk with your provider to understand the very rare risks for severe allergic reaction, serious injury, or death.



◀ Full answers & sources: sph.yale.edu/info-sheets