

Parents-Info

Vaccination of pregnant women against whooping cough

Since 2018, Quebec experts have recommended whooping cough vaccination for all pregnant women. The ideal time to get vaccinated is between the 26th and 32nd week of pregnancy. Experts recommend getting vaccinated during every pregnancy in order to protect the unborn baby before its own expected vaccination at 2 months of life.

What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough is a highly contagious disease that is characterized by severe coughing fits. It is caused by a bacterium that travels in droplets that are released into the air by an infected person.

Is whooping cough a problem in Canada today?

Since the introduction of the whooping cough vaccine in Canada in 1997-1998, there has been a steady decline in the number of whooping cough cases until 2011. However, between 2012 and 2015, outbreaks have occurred in Canada. In Quebec, there has been no increase in whooping cough cases since the early 2000s (stable number of hospitalized cases) and there are between 240 and 1600 cases of whooping cough each year.

Infants under 4 months of age make up 70% of hospitalizations due to whooping cough. On average, there are 39 hospitalizations per year for infants under 6 months of age, and 7 admissions to intensive care. In Quebec, 4 deaths due to whooping cough in children were reported over a 17-year period (2000 to 2016), for an average of about one death per 4 years (all were children less than 3 months old).

What is the whooping cough vaccine?

The whooping cough vaccine is a combination vaccine, which means that it protects against several diseases at once: diphtheria, whooping cough and tetanus. It does not contain live bacteria or viruses. Why vaccinate pregnant women against whooping cough?

Why vaccinate pregnant women against the whooping cough

According to the recommended immunization schedule, the first dose of the whooping cough vaccine is given to the baby at 2 months of age and several doses are needed to obtain a lasting protection. Infants are therefore not adequately protected during the critical first months of life. During pregnancy, administration of the whooping cough vaccine to the mother allows antibodies to be transmitted directly to the baby via the placenta. This protects the baby from birth until the time of its own vaccination.

Is vaccination of pregnant women effective?

Vaccination of pregnant women is effective in preventing whooping cough in their babies. According to Quebec national institute of public health , it prevents about 90% of hospitalizations and 95% of deaths related to this infection in children under 3 months of age.

Is this vaccination safe during pregnancy?

The whooping cough vaccine is considered safe for both the mother and the unborn child. Several countries offer vaccination to pregnant women and millions of doses have been administered. No significant adverse effects to the mother or fetus have been reported in countries that routinely offer this vaccine during pregnancy.

The most common side effects of the whooping cough vaccination are injection site reactions (redness, swelling or pain). Other less common symptoms include fever, chills and headache. As with any vaccine, there is a small risk of allergic reaction and anaphylactic shock.

Are there alternatives to vaccination?

No alternative has been proven to be as effective as vaccination. Since the vaccine does not provide 100% protection and newborns are more vulnerable, it is still important to protect them. You can do this by breastfeeding your baby, reducing contact with people who are sick and practicing good hand hygiene (for yourself and others).

How to receive the vaccine?

If you wish to receive the whooping cough vaccine, you can contact your CLSC to schedule an appointment. The vaccine is covered by the RAMQ, so it is free if you have a Quebec health insurance card.

For more information

You are invited to discuss it with your midwife or with your CLSC.