

## Pertussis Immunization (Vaccination) in Pregnancy – Central Zone

***Due to sustained high rates of pertussis (whooping cough) in Central Zone, Alberta Health Services is now recommending pertussis vaccine for all pregnant women.***

***A single dose of pertussis vaccine is recommended at 26 weeks or greater in each pregnancy. Pertussis vaccine given during pregnancy is safe, protects mothers, and protects newborn babies who are at greatest risk.***

### **What is Pertussis?**

Pertussis is a bacterial infection which usually begins as a runny nose, followed in a few days to a week by a cough. The cough can lead to difficulty breathing and end in vomiting or gagging. Severe disease, most often found in young babies in the first few months of life, can lead to pneumonia, seizures, problems with brain function, and rarely death. It is spread by droplets from the mouth and nose of infected people.

### **How can pertussis be prevented?**

Pertussis can be prevented by a vaccine. Doses are recommended for children at two, four, six and 18 months; four-six years of age; and 14-16 years of age. Adults should receive a single dose of vaccine after turning 18 years old. In Central Zone, all pregnant women should receive a dose at 26 weeks or greater, no matter how many doses they have received before or when they received them. The recommended vaccine for pregnant women, dTap, also provides protection against diphtheria and tetanus.

Vaccine effectiveness is highest after a recent dose, but drops over time. Infection in immunized persons, which can happen occasionally, is less severe than in unimmunized persons.

### **Why is pertussis immunization recommended for pregnant women in Central Zone?**

Central Zone has sustained high rates of pertussis. This increases the risk of infection for young babies, who are not fully protected by immunization until they are older than six months.

Immunizing pregnant women allows protective antibodies to be passed to the unborn baby, beginning at 30 weeks. This can reduce infection rates for babies by 90%. Since it takes at least two weeks following immunization to start passing antibodies, the ideal time to immunize is between 27 and 36 weeks, but 26 weeks to prior-to-delivery is acceptable.

### **Is the vaccine safe for baby and mother?**

Yes, immunization is safe for both baby and mother. The vaccine can also be given safely at the same time as influenza vaccine. Breastfeeding following pertussis immunization in pregnancy is safe.

### **Why is there an increased rate of pertussis cases in Central Zone?**

Some people have not been immunized at all, some have missed one or more doses, and vaccine effectiveness drops as time from immunization increases.

### **How do I get immunized?**

The dTap vaccine is available from some doctors' offices and by appointment at your local Community Health Centre.

### **What do I do if I have questions?**

You can find answers to your questions online at [www.immunizealberta.ca](http://www.immunizealberta.ca) or by contacting your local Community Health Centre. You can also call Health Link at 811.

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