Whooping cough and pregnancy
What you need to know and do to help protect your baby
2014 edition

Are we the only country to have this problem and to have the vaccination in pregnancy?
A number of countries are experiencing a similar problem including the USA which has seen rising numbers of cases and deaths in young children. The USA and New Zealand also recommend that women are vaccinated whilst they are pregnant and no risks to pregnancy have been found.

But is it safe to have the vaccine whilst pregnant?
There are no safety concerns related to having the vaccine during pregnancy. You may have some mild side effects from the vaccine that are common for all patients, such as swelling, redness or tenderness where the vaccine is given in your upper arm. Serious side effects are extremely rare.

What do I need to do now to help protect my baby?
If you are in week 28 or more of your pregnancy, your GP or midwife will contact you to arrange an appointment for you to have the vaccination. If you are in the earlier stages of pregnancy, wait until you hear from them.

The vaccination programme is already showing promising results but pregnant mothers still need to get vaccinated

Will my baby still need to be vaccinated against whooping cough at two months if I’ve had the vaccine while pregnant?
Yes, your baby should be vaccinated according to the normal schedule.

Where can I get more information?
You can talk to your GP, midwife or health visitor. Your pharmacist will also be able to give advice.

You can also visit the NHS Choices website.

Act now to protect your baby from whooping cough from birth

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There is a lot of whooping cough around at the moment and babies who are too young to start their vaccinations are at greatest risk.

Expectant mothers can help protect their babies by getting themselves vaccinated against whooping cough from week 28 of their pregnancy.

The vaccination programme introduced in 2012 is already showing very promising results in babies but, because the disease is still circulating at high levels in older age groups, pregnant mothers should continue to get vaccinated.

What is the problem?
You may have thought whooping cough had died out but the number of cases in England and Wales started to increase from late 2011 and in 2012 there were ten times as many cases as would be expected in a peak year of disease. Of particular concern was the rising number of cases in young babies who are at highest risk of severe complications.

To protect their babies from this serious disease all pregnant women are being offered the whooping cough vaccine. This programme has been in place since 1 October 2012 and has already been effective at protecting babies until they can have their first vaccination at two months of age.

Getting vaccinated from week 28 of your pregnancy will help protect your baby

Why should I be concerned?
Whooping cough is a serious disease that can lead to pneumonia and permanent brain damage. Most babies with whooping cough will be admitted to hospital and they are at risk of dying from the disease. Deaths from whooping cough are rare in the UK but more babies died during the outbreak in 2012 than in any other recent year.

Whooping cough is a serious disease that can lead to permanent brain damage in young infants

But aren’t babies vaccinated to protect them against diseases?
Yes they are, but the babies that have been getting whooping cough are generally too young to have started their normal vaccinations so they are not protected against the disease. Babies’ immune systems take time to make good responses to the vaccine and they need three doses to build up full protection.

So how can I protect my baby?
The only way you can help protect your baby against whooping cough in its first weeks after birth is by having the whooping cough vaccination yourself while you are pregnant. You will then pass some immunity to your baby before he or she is born. The best time to get vaccinated is between weeks 28 and 32 of your pregnancy but you can still have the vaccination up to week 38.

You should have the vaccination even if you were vaccinated when you were younger or had whooping cough yourself. If you have missed the vaccine during your pregnancy talk to your GP.