

BCG vaccine for babies and children



This leaflet is about the BCG vaccination that is being offered to protect your child against tuberculosis.

What is BCG vaccine?

BCG is short for Bacillus Calmette-Guérin. BCG vaccine contains a weakened form of the bacteria (germ) that cause **tuberculosis** (TB). The vaccine doesn't cause TB, but it helps your child develop protection (immunity) against TB in case he or she ever comes into contact with it. The BCG vaccination is particularly effective in protecting babies and young children against the more rare severe forms of TB such as TB meningitis (swelling of the protective coverings around the brain).

Why is my child being offered BCG?

In the UK, like many other countries, BCG is offered to babies and young children who are more likely than the general population to come into contact with someone with TB. This is because they either live in an area with high rates of TB, or their parents or grandparents came from a country with high rates of TB.

Cases of TB can be found all over the world, including in South-East Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and some countries in Eastern Europe. For a list of countries with high rates of TB visit: www.gov.uk/government/publications/tuberculosis-tb-by-country-rates-per-100000-people.

If unsure, talk to a health professional. With increasing numbers of people travelling around the world, the risk of people coming into contact with the disease also increases.

What is TB?

TB is a serious disease that usually affects the lungs, but can affect any part of the body. TB often develops slowly, and it can take several months for symptoms to appear.

Most people in this country recover fully after treatment, but this usually takes several months.

How is TB spread?

TB is usually spread when people with infectious TB in their lungs or throat cough or sneeze. However, it usually needs close contact with an infectious person over a long period of time to catch the disease.

Not everyone with TB in their lungs is infectious. Once they are taking the right treatment, most people will stop being infectious after about two weeks.

What are the symptoms of TB?

The symptoms of TB can vary depending on which part of the body is affected. Also, the signs of disease in a baby may be different from those in an adult or child. Babies may have very general symptoms such as being extremely tired, not eating well and failing to gain weight.

However, as TB disease that affects the lungs is infectious, it is important that you are aware of the symptoms that babies, older children and adults could have.

You should contact a doctor if you, your child, any other member of your family or a friend has any of the following:

- A persistent cough that lasts for more than three weeks
- A fever
- Heavy sweating at night
- Loss of appetite
- Unexplained weight loss or, for babies and children, failure to gain weight appropriately for their age
- Being very tired
- Coughing up blood

All of these symptoms may also be caused by other problems.

How common is TB?

TB is much less common in the UK than it was, but the number of cases has been rising since 1990. In Wales, TB is still a fairly uncommon condition, with around 110 to 120 new cases diagnosed each year.

How is my child immunised?

Your child will be given the BCG injection in the upper part of their left arm.

The vaccination is usually offered soon after birth while your baby is still in hospital, but it can be given at any time in a specialist clinic.

Are there any side effects from the vaccine?

Immediately after the injection, a raised blister will appear. Within two to six weeks a small spot will appear which may weep or ooze. It is completely normal for this to happen. Leave it open to the air, do not squeeze it and try not to dislodge any scab that may have formed. Occasionally, it may be necessary to protect the sore area with a dry dressing. You can wash and bath your child and take them swimming as normal. The sore may take several months to heal completely, and a small scar is likely to remain.

If you are worried or you think the sore has become infected, see your doctor.



Are there any reasons why my child should not have the BCG vaccination?

The injection should not be given, or should be delayed, if your child:

- Has had a previous anaphylactic (life-threatening) reaction to any of the ingredients in the vaccine
- Has a high fever on the day they are due to have the vaccination
- Is having treatment for cancer or other serious conditions that weaken the immune system
- May be HIV-positive, or
- Is suffering from a skin infection (if your child has eczema, they can still have the BCG but an injection site will be chosen that is free from eczema patches).

The injection should also not be given (or should be delayed) if the child's mother has received a medicine during pregnancy or breastfeeding that has weakened her immune system and could have been passed on to her baby for up to six months following the birth.

Do I need to know anything else?

Your baby should start their routine immunisations at two months of age, regardless of when they have their BCG.

You should make sure that your child is not given another injection in the same arm as the BCG for at least three months afterwards (otherwise the glands in that area may swell).

It is important to make sure that there is a record of the BCG vaccination in your child's Personal Child Health Record (Red Book) for future reference.

If you answer 'Yes' to any of the following questions, your child should have a BCG vaccination if he or she hasn't already had one:

- Is your child or are their parents or grandparents from a country with high rates of TB? (If unsure, talk to a health professional)
- Has your child lived for more than three months in a country with high rates of TB, or are they likely to?
- Is there anyone in your household, or anyone else who is likely to have prolonged contact with your child, who either has TB or has had it in the past, or comes from a country with high rates of TB?

Remember, treating TB takes a long time – preventing it is much easier.

Where can I get more information?

If you have any questions or want more information, talk to your doctor or nurse, call NHS Direct Wales on **0845 46 47** or 111 if available in your area or visit www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/

A schedule showing which immunisations are routinely offered in Wales is available from www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/livewell/vaccinations/Leaflets

You can find out more about the contents and potential side effects of the BCG vaccine at www.mhra.gov.uk/spc-pil/?subsName=BCG&pageID=SecondLevel

You can contact the charity TB Alert on 01273 234029 or email: contact@tbalert.org

To find out how the NHS uses your information visit: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/lifestylewellbeing/yourinfoyourrights

To order more copies of this leaflet visit: www.publichealthwales.org/HealthInformationResources