



Protecting babies against TB

## ***BCG and your baby or child***



Immunisation the safest  
way to protect your child





**This leaflet is about tuberculosis (TB) and the BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin) vaccination that is being offered to protect your child against it.**

## **What is TB?**



TB is a serious infectious disease that is very rare in babies and children in the UK (around 400 children under 15 years old are affected each year in England and Wales). TB can affect any part of the body. It can lead to TB meningitis (the lining of the brain swelling) in children. In young people and adults it usually affects the lungs, but it can also affect the glands, brain or bones.

Most people in this country recover fully after a complete course of treatment, but this takes several months.



## How do people catch TB?

TB can only be spread by people who have TB in their lungs or throat. The bacteria are present in tiny droplets that can be spread into the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. However, to catch the disease, you would need to come into close contact with an infectious person over a long period of time. People who have TB in the lungs or throat are not always infectious. TB cannot be spread by touching, sharing objects or spitting.

## How common is TB?

In the UK in the 1950s, there were over 50,000 new cases of TB every year. Today, this number has dropped to about 8,000 new cases a year across England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Most of these cases were in adults. TB is rare in babies in the UK. So, while becoming infected with TB is uncommon everybody should be aware of the symptoms. This is especially important because TB is a disease that affects people worldwide.





More people are travelling than ever before. People who live or work abroad, in countries where TB is common, are more at risk of coming into contact with the disease, becoming infected, and possibly getting the disease.

## Protecting babies and children against TB



The policy for offering BCG vaccinations in the UK is to protect people who are at higher risk of becoming infected with TB.

Although TB is a rare disease in babies and children within the UK, some are at higher risk. For those babies and children, a vaccination is the safest way to protect them. The BCG vaccination is offered when a child has been identified as being at higher risk, and it is most effective in protecting babies and young children from the more severe forms of TB. However, it doesn't stop everyone from getting TB.

The BCG vaccine is not just for babies. Older children (up to 15 years old) should also be vaccinated if they are at particular risk because of the factors listed in this leaflet.



## What is the BCG vaccine?

The BCG vaccine contains a weakened form of the bacteria (germs) that cause TB. Because it is weakened it doesn't actually cause TB, but it helps your child develop protection (immunity) against the disease in case he or she ever comes into contact with it.

## What are the symptoms of TB in babies?

TB can affect practically any part of the body, so the symptoms vary and the signs of the disease in a baby may be different from those in an adult. Often babies will have general symptoms like tiredness, not eating their food, and failing to gain weight.

You should contact a doctor if your baby has any of the following symptoms.

- General tiredness
- Failing to grow or develop well
- Sweating, especially at night
- Fever
- A cough that lasts more than three weeks
- Feeding poorly

However, as TB is infectious, it is important that you can recognise the disease in someone else. Babies with TB have usually recently been in close contact with an adult who has infectious TB.



## What are the symptoms of TB in older children and adults?

Below are the most common symptoms of TB in older children and adults. You should contact a doctor if you or a family member has any of the following.

- Weight loss following a loss of appetite
- Heavy sweating at night
- Fever
- A cough that lasts more than three weeks
- A general, unusual sense of tiredness and being unwell
- Coughing up blood (in the later stages)

## Why is my child being offered the BCG vaccine?

In the UK, like many other countries, the BCG vaccine is offered to babies and 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 come from a country with high rates of TB. Even babies born in the UK can be more at risk of TB through contact with parents or grandparents who are from countries with high rates of TB.

The BCG vaccine is not just for babies, older children (up to 15 years old) should also be vaccinated if they are at particular risk because of the factors listed above.



While babies that need the BCG vaccine are usually identified by the midwife or health visitor, older children will need to be identified in a different way. There are several ways of identifying whether older children need the BCG vaccine. Their school can identify that they were born in, or have links with, a country with high rates of TB. Their GP, practice nurse or health visitor can identify these risks when the child registers with a practice or has vaccinations or other health-related consultations. These risks may also be identified during 'new-entrant screening' when the child first arrives in Wales from a country with high rates of TB, or when getting advice about travelling abroad. Older children who have been identified as being at risk in any of these ways should be referred for the BCG vaccine at their local BCG clinic.



## How will my child be vaccinated?

Most babies and children will not need a skin test before they are vaccinated but for those that do, more than one visit might be necessary. The BCG will normally be given in the upper part of the child's left arm. The vaccination is usually offered soon after the baby is born, while your baby is still in hospital, but you may instead be invited to attend a BCG clinic later.

Immediately after the injection, a small, raised lump will appear on the child's arm where the needle went in. This shows that the injection has been given properly. Over the next two to six weeks the lump may

become scaly or crusted, but will eventually form a scab and heal to leave a small, round, flat scar. Leave the area uncovered as much as possible as this helps it heal.



## Are there any side effects?

Occasionally, babies might develop a shallow sore where they had the injection. If this is oozing fluid and needs to be covered, use a dry dressing - never a plaster - until a scab forms. This sore could take as long as several months to heal.

If you are worried or you think the sore has become infected, see your BCG vaccination clinic, BCG vaccination nurse or GP.

## Are there any reasons why my child shouldn't have the BCG vaccination?

Your child should not have the injection (or should delay having it) if they:

- have a high fever;
- are having treatment for cancer or other serious conditions that weaken the immune system;
- are HIV positive; or
- are suffering from a skin condition, such as severe eczema.

If you are concerned that the child should not have the injection, or that it should be delayed, discuss this with your BCG vaccination Clinic, BCG vaccination nurse or GP.

## Do I need to know anything else?

No matter when they have their BCG, as soon as they are two months old, your baby should start having vaccinations for diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), polio, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), pneumococcus and meningitis C. These are the routine vaccinations given to all babies in the UK.

Once they have had their BCG your child should not have any other vaccinations in the same arm for three months. They may have their BCG at the same time as another live vaccine (live vaccines include BCG, measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) and yellow fever). However, if they do not have these vaccinations at the same time, your child should delay having the second live vaccine for four weeks.

Make sure that your doctor's surgery know your child has had the BCG vaccination and that there is a record of it in your child's Personal Child Health Record (PCHR) (The red book).



## Does my child need the BCG? A checklist

If your child is under 16 and 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.

- Are any (one or more) of the child's parents or grandparents from one of the countries listed on page 13 and 14?
- Will you and your baby be going to live for more than three months or travelling regularly in one of these countries in the near future?
- Is there anyone in your house, or anyone else who is likely to have long-term close contact with your baby, who comes from one of these countries, has TB or has had it in the past?





## Countries with high rates of TB

The World Health Organisation (WHO) provides a list of countries with high rates of TB (more than 40 cases for every 100,000 people). You can find the list on the internet at [www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics\\_az/tb/epidemiology/who\\_tableI.htm](http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/tb/epidemiology/who_tableI.htm)

**The list of countries is updated every year and so you should check it for the most up-to-date information.**

The following list shows the countries which had more than 40 cases of TB for every 100,000 people recorded by the WHO in 2006.

Afghanistan	Chad	Gabon	Latvia
Algeria	China	Gambia	Lesotho
Angola	China, Hong Kong (special administrative region)	Georgia	Liberia
Argentina	China, Macao (special administrative region)	Ghana	Lithuania
Armenia	Colombia	Guam	Madagascar
Azerbaijan	Comoros	Guatemala	Malawi
Bahrain	Congo	Guinea	Malaysia
Bangladesh	Côte d'Ivoire	Guinea-Bissau	Maldives
Belarus	Croatia	Guyana	Mali
Belize	Djibouti	Haiti	Marshall Islands
Benin	Dominican Republic	Honduras	Mauritania
Bhutan	Democratic People's Republic of Korea	India	Mauritius
Bolivia	(North Korea)	Indonesia	Micronesia
Bosnia Herzegovina	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Iraq	Mongolia
Botswana	Ecuador	Kazakhstan	Morocco
Brazil	El Salvador	Kenya	Mozambique
Brunei Darussalam	Equatorial Guinea	Kiribati	Myanmar
Burkina Faso	Eritrea	Kyrgyzstan	Namibia
Burundi	Estonia	Laos (Lao peoples democratic republic)	Nepal
Cambodia	Ethiopia		New Caledonia
Cameroon			Nicaragua
Cape Verde			Niger
Central African Republic			Nigeria
			Northern Mariana Islands

Pakistan	Sudan	Vanuatu
Palau	Suriname	Venezuela
Panama	Swaziland	Vietnam
Papua New Guinea	Syrian Arab Republic	Yemen
Paraguay	Tajikistan	Zambia
Peru	Thailand	Zimbabwe
Philippines	Timor-Leste	
Portugal	Togo	
Qatar	Turkmenistan	
Republic of Korea	Uganda	Source: WHO, Global Tuberculosis
Republic of Moldova	Ukraine	Control: Surveillance, Planning,
Romania	United Republic of	Financing, WHO Report 2006,
Russian Federation	Tanzania	Geneva, WHO/HTM/TB/2006.362.
Rwanda	Uzbekistan	See: <a href="http://www.who.int/tb/publications/global_report/">www.who.int/tb/publications/global_report/</a>
Sao Tome and Principe		
Saudi Arabia		
Senegal		
Sierra Leone		
Singapore		
Solomon Islands		
Somalia		
South Africa		
Sri Lanka		

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



## More information

For more information on protecting yourself, your family and friends against TB, you can contact:

- the TB or respiratory nurse specialist at your local chest clinic or hospital;
- NHS Wales Direct on 0845 46 47;
- your doctor; or
- TB Alert, a charity committed to raising awareness about the disease and fighting it worldwide.

You can contact TB Alert at:

22 Tiverton Road

London

NW10 3HL.

Phone: 0845 456 0995

E-mail: [info@tbalert.org](mailto:info@tbalert.org)

Registered charity number: 1071886

Information about TB is also available on these websites:

**The National Public Health Service for Wales**

[www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk/  
icds/page.cfm?pid=167](http://www2.nphs.wales.nhs.uk/icds/page.cfm?pid=167)





## The Department of Health (UK Government)

[www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/Tuberculosis/fs/en](http://www.dh.gov.uk/PolicyAndGuidance/HealthAndSocialCareTopics/Tuberculosis/fs/en)

## NHS vaccinations information

[www.immunisation.nhs.uk/article.php?id=43](http://www.immunisation.nhs.uk/article.php?id=43)

## The UK Health Protection Agency

[www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics\\_az/tb/menu.htm](http://www.hpa.org.uk/infections/topics_az/tb/menu.htm)

## The World Health Organisation

[www.who.int/topics/tuberculosis/en](http://www.who.int/topics/tuberculosis/en)

## TB Alert (Charity)

[www.tbalert.org](http://www.tbalert.org)

NHS Wales Direct Interactive - this is a service that provides general health information. It is available on digital satellite TV by pressing the interactive button on the remote control.

Electronic versions of this leaflet (along with translated material) will be available at: [www.wales.gov.uk/immunisation](http://www.wales.gov.uk/immunisation)

Further copies of this leaflet can be ordered from the Welsh Assembly Government Publication Centre by e-mail: [assembly-publications@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:assembly-publications@wales.gsi.gov.uk) or telephone: 029 2082 3683 (between 8.00am - 5.00pm, Monday - Friday).