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# Rotavirus



Protect your baby against rotavirus infection – a common cause of diarrhoea and sickness that can be very serious.



## **What is rotavirus?**

Most babies have sickness (vomiting) and diarrhoea at some time. Many of these illnesses are caused by rotavirus.

Most babies recover at home. Some cases can become serious with babies getting dehydrated (losing body fluids) and needing hospital treatment.

Before the introduction of the rotavirus vaccine programme most children got rotavirus at some time before there were five years old. In Wales one in five of these children required medical attention and one in ten were admitted to hospital. Vaccination is now helping to stop seven out of every ten cases of rotavirus infection.

## **How is rotavirus spread?**

Rotavirus is spread very easily and babies can pass it on to others. The virus spreads through hand to mouth contact and is picked up from surfaces such as toys, hands or nappies.

Washing hands and keeping surfaces clean can help but can never completely stop it spreading. The best way to protect your baby is to give them the vaccine.

## **When will my baby be offered the vaccination?**

Rotavirus vaccine will be given with your baby's other vaccinations at two months and three months. Your baby needs two rotavirus vaccines at least four weeks apart.

If your baby misses one of the vaccinations, it can also be given with the other vaccines at two and four months of age, or at three and four months, but no later.

## **Why can't older babies have the vaccine?**

As they get older, some babies (about one in 1,000) can get a condition that causes a blockage in their lower gut called intussusception. It is very rare before three months of age, most cases occur between five months and a year. There is a very small chance, around two in every 100,000 babies, that the first dose of the vaccine might also cause this.

To reduce the risk, the first dose will not be given to babies older than 14 weeks, and no vaccine will be given to infants older than 23 weeks.

## **How is the vaccine given?**

Rotavirus vaccine is given as a sweet tasting liquid from a dropper to make it easier for your baby to swallow.

## **What if my baby vomits immediately after having the vaccine?**

This doesn't usually happen, but if it does the drops will be given again.

## **Will my baby get the rotavirus disease from having the vaccine?**

No, the viruses in the vaccine are weakened so they don't cause the disease. The vaccine helps your baby build up immunity so the next time he or she comes into contact with the virus they will have the best possible protection.

All those in close contact with recently vaccinated infants, especially those with weakened immune systems, should observe good hygiene, for example, washing their hands after changing a child's nappy.

## **Does the vaccine have any side effects?**

Millions of doses of the vaccine have been used and it has a good safety record.

Babies who have had the vaccine can become restless and irritable, and some may develop mild diarrhoea.

If you are concerned about your baby's health after any vaccination you should speak to your doctor or health visitor.

In very rare cases (about two in every 100,000 babies vaccinated), the vaccine can affect the baby's lower gut and they may develop pain, vomiting, and may pass what looks like red jelly in their nappies, usually within seven days of vaccination. If this happens, you should contact your doctor immediately.

## **What if my baby is ill on the day the vaccination is due?**

There is no reason to postpone the appointment unless your baby is ill with a fever, is vomiting or has diarrhoea.

## **Are there any babies who should not have the vaccine?**

The vaccination should not be given to babies who:

- Are over 23 weeks of age.
- Are over 14 weeks of age if attending for their first rotavirus vaccine.





- Have had an anaphylactic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine, or to any of the ingredients.
- Have a previous history of intussusception (blockage in lower gut).
- Have a long term condition, affecting the gut or immune system. Discuss this with your GP first.
- Have a fever, diarrhoea or vomiting on the day of the appointment. The visit should be rearranged.

## **My baby was born premature. When should the vaccine be given?**

The immunisation schedule should be followed based on the age of the child from the actual date your baby was born.

## **Can my baby be breast fed after the vaccination?**

Yes. There are no problems with breast-feeding babies who have recently had the rotavirus vaccine.

## **Will the vaccine stop babies getting any sickness and diarrhoea?**

No. Rotavirus isn't the only cause of sickness and diarrhoea in babies, but the vaccine will stop about seven out of ten babies getting rotavirus.

## **Rotavirus vaccination – the *key* messages**

- Infection with rotavirus causes sickness and diarrhoea in babies and young children.
- It can be very serious, and some babies may need to go to hospital.
- rotavirus vaccine is given by mouth with other vaccines at two and three months of age.
- Two doses of the rotavirus vaccine will help prevent seven out of ten cases of rotavirus infection in babies.

## Where can I find more information?

You can find out more about the vaccine used including vaccine contents and potential side effects at [www.medicines.org.uk/emc/](http://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/) by entering the name of the vaccine in the search box and looking at the patient information leaflet (PIL). The vaccine currently used is called Rotarix®.

The routine immunisation schedule that shows you which immunisations are offered in Wales is available from [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/livewell/vaccinations/Leaflets/](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/livewell/vaccinations/Leaflets/)

If you have any questions or want more information, talk to your doctor or nurse, look at the Question and Answer sheet available at NHS Direct Wales [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/) or call them direct on **0845 4647**.

To order more copies of this leaflet, email: [hplibrary@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:hplibrary@wales.nhs.uk) or telephone **029 2010 4650**.

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