

Vaccinations and Breastfeeding

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If you have any questions about this information, you can contact the Drugs in Breastmilk team through their [Facebook page](#) or on druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk.

You can usually have most vaccinations whilst you are breastfeeding.

Levels of the vaccines that can pass into your breastmilk are very low, and there is very little evidence of risk to your breastfed child. For some vaccinations, your child may receive additional antibodies in your breastmilk following your vaccination, which may give them extra protection.

Your child will still need their own vaccines for their own immunity.

If you need a yellow fever vaccination whilst breastfeeding, you can discuss this with your doctor. You will need special advice if your baby is under 9 months old.

How Do Vaccines Work?

Vaccines usually contain components that are similar or related to part of the disease-causing microorganism (such as a virus or bacteria) that they are designed to protect against. These components are often made from weakened or inactive forms of the microorganism. Vaccines work by stimulating your body's immune system to recognise the microorganism as a threat and destroy it, by producing antibodies. This means your immune system will be better prepared if you encounter the real microorganism.

There are lots of different types of vaccines that work in different ways.

Some vaccines are inactive. These contain either a "dead" version of the virus or bacteria, or only a product or part of it. These are not capable of causing any infection and are compatible with breastfeeding.

Some vaccines are "live" or "attenuated". These vaccines contain a version of the virus or bacteria that is weakened, so it is no longer harmful, but not completely inactive. In some rare cases, you might develop a mild version of the disease after having a live vaccine. These vaccines are safe for most people but may not be suitable for you if you are pregnant, immunocompromised, or in some cases,

To talk to a mum who knows about breastfeeding call the National Breastfeeding Helpline 0300 100 0212

Calls to 0300 numbers cost no more than calls to UK numbers starting 01 and 02 and will be part of any inclusive minutes that apply to your provider and call package.

if you are in close contact with someone who is immunocompromised. Your doctor will be able to discuss this with you. You can have live vaccines whilst you are breastfeeding, as there is no evidence that your baby could contract the illness via your breastmilk. The only exception is the [Yellow Fever vaccine](#), for which special advice is needed.

When you are vaccinated against a disease, your body creates antibodies, which will protect you if you encounter the disease in the future. These antibodies may pass into your breastmilk. They are not harmful to your child and in some cases, they may help to protect your child from the disease. It is however very important that your child still had all their own vaccines, as recommended by the [national guidelines on childhood vaccinations](#), to ensure they are fully protected.

Common Vaccines

Chicken pox (varicella): You can have the [chickenpox \(varicella\) vaccine](#) whilst you are breastfeeding. It is available from the NHS for certain groups of people if they haven't yet had chicken pox themselves.

COVID-19: You can have any of the available COVID-19 vaccines if you are breastfeeding and you are eligible. There is no evidence the COVID-19 vaccine can harm your baby through your breastmilk. If you catch COVID-19 however, you could pass the infection to your baby via your close contact. See our [page on COVID-19](#) for more information.

Hepatitis A: You can have a [hepatitis A vaccine](#) if you are breastfeeding. It is available from the NHS for certain people who are at risk of hepatitis A, including those in contact with body fluids at work. It is also available privately if you are travelling to at-risk areas.

Hepatitis B: You can have a [hepatitis B vaccine](#) if you are breastfeeding. Vaccination is routinely offered to healthcare professionals and people who may come into contact with body fluids at work. It may also be recommended for people who are at higher risk for other reasons. It is available privately if you are travelling to at-risk areas.

Influenza: You can have an [influenza vaccination](#) if you are breastfeeding. It is recommended and available from the NHS for certain groups, including pregnant people. These groups are listed on the [NHS flu vaccine page](#). It is also available privately each year. The children's flu vaccine is offered to all children aged 2 or over, and some babies from 6 months with certain long-term health conditions. You and your breastfed child can both have the vaccine at the same time.

Meningitis (meningococcal): You can have a [meningococcal vaccine](#) if you are breastfeeding. It is usually given in the childhood schedule but may be offered up to the age of 25 years to catch up, and for certain people at risk due to their job or others who have had their spleen removed, in accordance with current [guidance](#).

MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccination: You can have an [MMR vaccination](#) if you are breastfeeding. It is offered through the NHS if you are not immune to rubella or need to complete your vaccine schedule. Although the rubella vaccine virus component might pass into your breastmilk, the virus has not been found to cause symptoms in babies. The vaccine is given by injection as it is destroyed if taken orally. This means your baby will not be able to absorb any into their system from your breastmilk. Mumps and measles have not been found to pass into breastmilk.

[Mpox](#) (formerly known as Monkeypox) - smallpox vaccine: You can have the smallpox vaccine if you are breastfeeding and are at risk of contracting mpox. You will be offered the smallpox vaccine (MVA-BN, IMVANEX®) through the NHS if you fall into certain [risk groups](#), including people at occupational risk or if you've been in contact with someone who has mpox. There isn't any data on the safety of the vaccine in breastfeeding, but the virus in the vaccine does not grow well in the

human body and so cannot spread to your child through your breastmilk. If you catch mpox, however, you could pass the infection to your baby via your close contact, and mpox may be more severe in small babies. See the page [Protecting your family against mpox: information on the mpox vaccination for contacts](#) for more information.

Pneumonia: You can have a [pneumococcal vaccination](#) if you are breastfeeding. It is offered through the NHS for people at higher risk of becoming seriously ill from pneumonia.

Diphtheria, Polio and Tetanus: The [Td/IPV vaccine](#) (also called the 3-in-1 teenage booster) is the single vaccine used in the UK to help protect against [tetanus](#), [diphtheria](#) and [polio](#). You can have this vaccine if you are breastfeeding. It is available to adults through the NHS. You will be offered this vaccine if you need to catch up with your vaccine schedule, travel to an at-risk area or if your job requires additional protection. Sometimes other vaccines may be offered if the 3-in-1 isn't available including [Boostrix IPV 4-in-1](#) which may also be used while breastfeeding.

Tuberculin skin test and BCG vaccine for tuberculosis: You can have the tuberculin skin test, and the [BCG vaccine](#) for tuberculosis if you are breastfeeding. The BCG vaccine is only needed once. If you haven't had it previously it may be offered to you through the NHS if you are in a high-risk area or if your job puts you at risk of exposure to tuberculosis. If you need the vaccine for travelling, you will be able to receive this privately.

Typhoid Vaccination: You can have a typhoid vaccination if you are breastfeeding. [Typhoid vaccination](#) is available through the NHS and is recommended for anyone travelling to areas of the world where typhoid is a risk. The vaccine is available as a single inactivated injected vaccine (either on its own, or combined with the hepatitis A vaccine), or as a live vaccine taken as 3 oral capsules taken on alternate days. You can have either if you are breastfeeding. Your healthcare professional will help you choose the best one for you. The single dose Typhim Vi® injection is licenced for use from 2 years of age, and vaccination is recommended by [national guidelines](#) from 1 year of age for babies going to high-risk areas.

Whooping Cough (pertussis): You can have a whooping cough vaccination if you are breastfeeding. If you are pregnant, the NHS recommends that you have the [whooping cough vaccine](#) when you are around 20 weeks pregnant. It can be given from 16 weeks, and should ideally be given before 32 weeks, to protect your new-born baby. It can still be given later if you have not yet had the vaccine by 32 weeks. If you don't have the vaccine during your pregnancy, you can have it after your baby is born, whilst you are breastfeeding. This will not provide as much protection to your baby, but it will still reduce the risk of you catching it and passing it on. You can find more information on [whooping cough](#) on the NHS website.

You will usually be offered a vaccine called [ADACEL](#) that protects against whooping cough, diphtheria and tetanus. If the ADACEL vaccine is not available or suitable for you, you'll be offered a vaccine called [Boostrix IPV 4-in-1](#) that protects against whooping cough, diphtheria, tetanus and polio. There is no evidence that having these vaccines during pregnancy or breastfeeding is unsafe for either you or your baby. The vaccine cannot cause whooping cough.

Yellow Fever: The [Yellow Fever vaccine](#) is offered from the age of 9 months for people travelling to high-risk areas. It is a live vaccine and there is some evidence that the vaccine virus can be transmitted to younger babies from breast milk. If you are breastfeeding, your doctor will decide with you if it's appropriate for you to have the vaccine. If you are breastfeeding a baby under 9 months old expert advice is needed from NaTHNaC (travelhealthpro.org.uk) or Public Health Scotland (travax.nhs.uk) before administering yellow fever vaccine, in line with [national guidelines](#).

General recommendations on immunisation

The [Green Book](#) has the latest information on vaccines and vaccination procedures, for vaccine preventable infectious diseases in the UK. It includes chapters on vaccines not specifically mentioned here. Chapter 6 discusses contraindications and special considerations, including some information on vaccination while breastfeeding.

Travel Vaccinations

For more information on travel vaccinations, please see [NHS travel vaccination advice](#). Polio, typhoid, hepatitis A, and cholera vaccines can be obtained through the NHS. Other vaccinations are available privately through travel and other private clinics including some pharmacies.

Additional Considerations

Some people may need to discuss their vaccinations further, these include:

- individuals with a history of a confirmed anaphylactic reaction to a previous dose or component of the vaccine
- individuals with primary or acquired immunodeficiency
- individuals on current or recent immunosuppressive or immunosuppressive biological therapy
- infants who may be immunosuppressed; this includes infants born to a mother who received immunosuppressive biological therapy during pregnancy; this may affect the vaccinations the infant may receive themselves directly
- those in contact with an individual with immunodeficiency, or undergoing current or recent immunosuppressive treatment, including biological therapy
- individuals who are pregnant

If you have questions that aren't covered by this factsheet, please contact the Drugs in Breastmilk team, by email on druginformation@breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk, or through their [Facebook page](#).

Related factsheets

- [Coughs and cold remedies](#)
- [COVID-19 and breastfeeding](#)
- [Influenza](#)
- [Patient Information Leaflets: What do they mean?](#)

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