

Information for patients, parents or carers

BCG Vaccine

This leaflet is about the BCG (Bacillus Calmette-Guérin) vaccination that is being offered to protect your baby against tuberculosis (TB). The information in this leaflet has been taken from the UKHSA leaflet TB, BCG vaccine and your baby.

What is the BCG Vaccine?

BCG vaccine contains a weakened form of the bacteria (germ) that causes TB. Because it is weakened it doesn't cause TB, but it helps your baby develop protection (immunity) against TB in case they are exposed to it. The BCG vaccination is particularly effective in protecting babies and young children against the rarer severe forms of TB such as TB meningitis (swelling of the lining of the brain).

What is TB?

TB is a bacterial infection. It usually affects the lungs but can also affect any part of the body. Infection with the TB germ may not develop into TB disease. TB disease develops slowly in the body, and it takes several months for symptoms to appear. Most people who have TB infection will never develop TB disease. In these people, the TB germ remains inactive for a lifetime. In other people (for example, those who have weak immune systems), the TB germ may become active and cause TB disease. Most people in this country recover fully after treatment, but this takes several months.

What are the symptoms of TB?

TB can affect any part of the body. The symptoms will vary and the signs of disease in a baby may be different from those of an adult. As TB is infectious, it is important that you can recognise the disease in someone else. You should contact a doctor if you, your baby, or any other member of your family, or a friend has any of the following:

- persistent cough that lasts for more than two weeks
- fever
- sweating, especially at night
- unexplained weight loss
- failure for a baby to put on weight
- a general and unusual sense of tiredness and being unwell
- coughing up blood

How is TB caught?

You can only catch TB from someone whose lungs or throat are already infected and who is coughing. When they cough, a spray of tiny droplets is produced that contain the bacteria. If someone breathes in the droplets, they too can catch the infection. It takes sharing of an

enclosed space with an infected person, for example living in the same house, to be at risk of being infected.

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 just over 5,000 new cases a year. While it is unlikely that your child will get infected, everybody should be aware of the symptoms of TB. This is especially important because TB is a widespread disease worldwide. The risk of disease is higher in people who have lived or worked in countries with high rates of TB. Children from these families are also more likely to have close contact with infected members of their community, either in the UK or in their country of origin.

Why is my baby being offered the BCG?

In the UK, like many other countries, BCG is offered to babies who are likely to spend time with someone with TB. This includes babies who live in an area with high rates of TB or babies with parents or grandparents from a country with high rates of TB. We also offer the vaccine to babies if members of their immediate family have had TB in the past.

The BCG vaccine may not be given or delayed if:

- Your baby has a high fever
- Your baby is suffering from an infected skin condition
- Your baby is on treatment for cancer or other serious illness
- The Babys mother had immunosuppressive biological therapy in pregnancy
- There is a family history of severe combined immunodeficiency disease (SCID) or your baby may have SCID.

How is my baby immunised?

Your baby will be given the BCG vaccination in the upper part of the left arm, this is usually before eight weeks of age although this may be longer. It is safe for your baby to receive the BCG vaccination on the same day as their routine immunisations unless they have a fever with them. We will record the BCG vaccine in your child's red book and also via Child health who will update GP records.

Are there any side effects?

Immediately after the injection a raised blister will appear. Within six weeks of the injection a small spot will appear. This may be sore for a few days, but it should gradually heal if you don't cover it. It may leave a small scar, but this is normal. Occasionally, your baby may develop a shallow sore where they had the injection. If this is weeping fluid and needs to be covered, use a dry dressing – never a plaster – until a scab forms. This sore may take up to eight months to heal after receiving the BCG vaccine. If your baby develops lumps under their left armpit or your baby's arm is red and hot to touch around the injection site and you think the sore may be infected, see your GP.

What could my baby's arm look like afterwards?



Not all babies react like this to the vaccine. one in five babies get no mark or scar at all. This does not mean the vaccine has been given is ineffective and it will still protect your baby. If you have any concerns, please ring the infectious diseases secretary on 0191 2825984 and press option 4.



QR code for BCG leaflet in different languages

For further information

Contact details

Lyndsey Winship Infectious Diseases Specialist nurse 0191 2823713 (Monday to Friday 08.30am to 4pm) excluding Bank holidays

Email: Lyndsey.winship@nhs.net

PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) for help, advice and information about NHS services. You can contact them on freephone 0800 032 02 02, email pals@nhct.nhs.uk.

<https://www.northumbria.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/share-your-feedback/patient-and-advice-liaison-service-pals#9882d87e>

Useful websites

If you would like further information about health conditions and treatment options, you may wish to have a look at the NHS website at www.nhs.uk

If you would like to find accessibility information for our hospitals, please visit www.accessable.co.uk

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