

# Diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough) (dTpa) vaccine

## Parent Information Sheet

The Australian Government makes some vaccines for teenagers free under the National Immunisation Program (NIP).

### Q. What are diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough)?

**Diphtheria** is a bacterial infection that spreads easily and can cause breathing problems, skin sores, or inflammation of the heart muscle or nerves.

**Tetanus** is a dangerous disease caused by a bacterium. It affects the nerves and can cause painful muscle spasms, lockjaw, and other complications like pneumonia or broken bones (from the muscle spasms).

**Whooping cough** is a bacterial infection that causes severe coughing and trouble breathing. In babies, it can be life threatening. In older children and adults, the cough can last for months.

### Q. How do these diseases spread?

**Diphtheria** spreads through coughs, sneezes, or contact with discharges from an infected person's mouth, nose, or skin.

**Tetanus** is caused by bacteria in soil. It enters the body through cuts, scratches, or wounds contaminated with dirt, dust or manure.

**Whooping cough** spreads through droplets from coughing or sneezing. An untreated person can spread it for up to 3 weeks after their cough starts.

### Q. How do vaccines work?

Vaccines help your immune system fight infections. If a vaccinated person gets exposed to these infections, their immune system can fight it better, either preventing the disease developing or making it less severe.

### Q. How effective is the vaccine?

The vaccine is very effective in preventing diphtheria and tetanus and about 80% effective against whooping cough.

### Q. How many doses does my child need?

If your child has completed a course of 3 doses, your child needs one booster dose of the **dTpa vaccine** at 12-13 years to stay protected into early adulthood.

If your child has never had a diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis vaccine, they will need 3 doses of a diphtheria-tetanus vaccine. At least one of the vaccine doses should also protect against whooping cough, with at least 4 weeks between doses.

### Q. Who should get this vaccine?

All teenagers should get one dose of the **dTpa vaccine** to protect against diphtheria, tetanus, and whooping cough.

This booster is important to keep their immunity strong after earlier childhood vaccines. If your child had a diphtheria-tetanus vaccine before, they can still get the dTpa vaccine to add protection against whooping cough.

### Q. Who should not get the vaccine?

Do not give the vaccine to anyone who:

- had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to a previous dose
- had a severe allergic reaction to an ingredient in the vaccine.

### Q. Can pregnant people get the vaccine?

Yes. Pregnant people should get the vaccine between 20 and 32 weeks of every pregnancy, this can help protect the baby in its first few months.

If the person is being vaccinated at school or through the Intensive English Centre (IEC), then they will need to get vaccinated at the GP or pharmacy. On vaccination day, nurses will ask female students if they are or could be pregnant. If a student says yes, she will not be vaccinated. She will be advised to talk to her parent or doctor and will be given contact details for a support service.

**Q. How safe are vaccines?**

Vaccines in Australia are very safe. They must pass strict safety checks before approval by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA also monitors vaccine safety after use.

**Q. What is in the vaccine?**

The vaccine contains small amounts of:

- aluminium hydroxide and phosphate
- formaldehyde
- polysorbate 80
- glycine.

It was also exposed to bovine-derived materials during manufacturing.

**Q. What are the side effects of the vaccine?**

Mild side effects are common and may include:

- redness, swelling, or pain where the shot was given
- fever.

Serious side effects are very rare.

For more information, check the Consumer Medicines Information (CMI) at [health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination](http://health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination). If you are concerned about side effects, contact your GP.

**Q. What is anaphylaxis?**

Anaphylaxis is a very rare but severe allergic reaction. It can cause unconsciousness or death if not treated quickly. Immunisation providers are trained to manage anaphylaxis.

**Q. What if a person had a reaction to an earlier vaccine?**

If the person did not have an immediate severe allergic reaction to a previous vaccine, it is safe for them to get the dTpa vaccine.

**Q. Who can give consent, and can it be withdrawn?**

Parents or guardians must give consent for students under 18. Students aged 18 and older can give their own consent by signing the Consent Form.

You can withdraw consent at any time by writing to the school or calling them.

**Q. What if I wait until my child is older?**

The dTpa vaccine is only provided at school if you return the signed consent form while your child is in an Intensive English Centre or Year 7. If you wait, you must arrange vaccination with your GP or pharmacy.

**Q. What if my child missed the vaccine because they were sick or absent?**

If your child missed their vaccination at school, arrange a catch-up as soon as possible. Some schools offer catch-up clinics. If not, the school will provide a letter for your GP or pharmacist to complete the course.

**Q. How can I access a record of my child's vaccinations?**

Your child's vaccination record will be added to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR).

Parents can request their child's Immunisation History Statement until the child turns 14. Students aged 14 and older can request their own record. You can access it:

- through your Medicare online account at [my.gov.au](https://my.gov.au)
- using the Medicare Express Plus App: [servicesaustralia.gov.au/express-plus-mobile-apps](https://servicesaustralia.gov.au/express-plus-mobile-apps)
- by calling the AIR General Enquiries Line at 1800 653 809.

**Q. What happens to my child's information?**

The information on the Consent Form is private and protected by law. It will be added to the NSW Health immunisation register and linked to the AIR so it can be viewed on MyGov.

**Q. Where can I find more information about school vaccination?**

You can find more details:

- on the NSW Health website: [health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination](https://health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination)
- by calling your local public health unit at 1300 066 055.

## Your next steps:

- If you want your child to get the diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine, complete and sign the Consent Form. Return it to the school with your child.
- If you do not want your child to get the vaccine, do not provide consent.

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October 2024 © NSW Health. SHPN (HP NSW) 240751-1.

