

BCG Vaccine Q&A Sheet

Q. Why is the City of Manchester no longer vaccinating all babies?

A. Public Health England recommends that if the number of TB cases in an area is greater than 40/100,000 then all babies living in that area are offered a BCG vaccine. Previously the City of Manchester was above this rate. In recent years the number of cases of TB in the City of Manchester has been consistently falling. TB experts across Greater Manchester have reviewed the evidence and believe it is no longer necessary to vaccinate **all** babies.

Q. What is the BCG vaccine?

A. BCG vaccine protects those at highest risk of Tuberculosis (TB), either because they are born in areas where the rates of TB are high, or because members of their family were born in countries with a high incidence of TB. The illness is a bacterial infection that mainly affects the lungs. It is spread through inhaling tiny droplets from the coughs or sneezes of an infected person, but it is important to be aware that it usually only spreads after prolonged close contact with someone with the illness. Further information on the [symptoms of tuberculosis and BCG vaccine](#) is available from www.nhs.uk

Q. How does the vaccine work?

A. The [BCG vaccine](#) contains a strain of mycobacterium bovis, which is a bacterium that causes tuberculosis (TB) in cattle. The bacteria are altered so that they do not cause a TB infection, but stimulate your immune system to make you resistant to the disease.

Q. Why is TB still a problem?

A. It was hoped that with the invention of the BCG vaccine and medicines, it would be possible to wipe out TB in the same way smallpox was eradicated. This has turned out to be difficult for a number of reasons.

- Much of the initial improvement in TB in more developed countries was related to improvements in housing, nutrition and access to treatment. Poor conditions are still present in many less developed countries.
- Several strains of TB bacteria have developed a resistance to one or more anti-TB medications, making them much harder to treat.
- The BCG vaccination is effective against severe forms of the disease, such as TB meningitis in children, but it is not as effective against all forms of TB.
- The global epidemic of HIV that began in the 1980s has led to a corresponding epidemic of TB cases. This is because HIV weakens a person's immune system, making them more likely to develop a TB infection.
- The rapid growth of international travel has allowed people to travel widely and this has helped to spread of the disease.

Q. How common is TB in England?

A. TB isn't very common in this country. There were 9,042 new cases of TB in the UK in 2011.

Most of the infections are in London, with 3,588 cases reported in 2011, accounting for 40% of the UK total. According to the provisional data, country of origin was recorded in 8,453 new cases and almost three-quarters (6,270) were in people who weren't born in the UK.

Q. Where in the world is TB widespread?

A. TB is found throughout the world. Parts of the world known to have high rates of TB include sub-Saharan Africa (all the countries south of the Sahara desert) and Asia. For more information, see the [WHO website](#).

Q. Is TB contagious?

A. Yes. TB is spread when a person with an active infection of TB in their lungs coughs or sneezes and somebody else inhales a droplet of contaminated saliva. However, TB is not as infectious as the common cold or flu. You usually need to spend a long time in close contact with an infected person before you catch TB. For example, infections usually spread between family members who are living in the same house. Read more about [how you catch TB](#).

Q. How do I know if my baby needs the BCG vaccination?

A. The BCG vaccination is recommended for babies up to one year old who:

- are born in areas where the rates of TB are high
- have one or more parents or grandparents who were born in countries with a high incidence of TB

If it's advised that your baby has the BCG vaccine, the jab is usually offered soon after birth or while your baby is still in hospital.

Your midwife, Health Visitor or GP will be able to tell you if a BCG vaccination is recommended for your baby.

Q. I received a letter when my baby was born telling me that my baby would be offered a BCG vaccination when vaccine stocks became available. Can my baby still have the BCG vaccination?

A. Your baby does not require the BCG vaccination unless he/she fits into the categories set out above. However you will receive a letter through the post and there will be an opportunity to request the vaccination for your baby if you still want to.