

# BCG Vaccine

For babies and children at risk  
of catching Tuberculosis (TB)



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BCG VACCINE

### BCG vaccination eligibility

#### **Why is the cut off limit five years old?**

Only children under five years old are eligible for the BCG vaccine in New Zealand. This is because they are more at risk of developing serious complications from Tuberculosis (TB), and the vaccine is most effective on children under five years old.

#### **Can I book a vaccine privately?**

In New Zealand it is not possible to book a TB vaccine privately. The vaccine is only available through public health outreach services.

#### **We are going on holiday for less than three months to a country where TB is common. Can my child get vaccinated?**

If your child will be in the country for less than three months they are not eligible for the vaccine (although they could still be eligible for other reasons). While you are abroad your children aged under five should avoid contact with people who are sick, coughing or unwell with fevers.

### The BCG vaccination appointment

#### **Is it free?**

The BCG vaccination and clinic appointment are free for any eligible child in the Auckland region. If a Mantoux skin test is required this will also be free.

#### **When is the best time for my baby to have a BCG vaccination?**

It is best for your baby to have the vaccine between birth and six months old. They are eligible to receive the vaccine up until they are five.

If your baby is older than six months they may need to have a Mantoux skin test to see if they have been exposed to TB. It is free but you will need to arrange this test for your child 72 hours (three days) before they have their BCG vaccination.

#### **Why are clinics no longer being run in the practices/venues they were in the past?**

Vaccinating in a COVID-19 safe way is a priority for us. To achieve this we need a big enough space for children and their caregivers to be socially distanced from others when at the clinic.

#### **I have one child under six months old and another older child less than five years of age that both need a BCG vaccine. What should I do?**

We will aim to schedule your under six month old baby and your older child to have their vaccines at the same clinic appointment. However we will always try and get the younger baby to have their BCG vaccine before they reach six months of age, so they will be prioritised.

Infants over six months old may also require a skin test before the vaccine. The older child's vaccination date will also therefore need to align with the skin test clinic availability. This means

you might need to take your children to two separate appointments.

### **How do I find out if my child needs a Mantoux skin test before their BCG vaccination?**

Only some children over six months old require a Mantoux skin test prior to their vaccination. This is to check if they have been exposed to TB already.

If your child is older than six months old we will check whether they need a [Mantoux skin test](#) when we offer you an appointment.

### **My child has pre-existing medical conditions/concerns. Will it be okay for them to receive the BCG vaccine?**

In most cases the vaccine can still be given, but please tell the nurse about any pre-existing conditions for your baby and the birth mother when you attend the clinic.

- If your baby was born prematurely they need to be at least 34 weeks of gestational age (the age they would have been during your pregnancy) before we can vaccinate them.
- If the birth mother of your child has HIV (or was taking immunosuppressive medication during pregnancy or while breastfeeding) we may need to delay their vaccination until you have clearance from a paediatrician or your child has reached a certain age. Please contact us to discuss in more detail if this is relevant for your child
- If your baby has, or is currently being checked for any illness such as cancer, HIV, kidney disease, diabetes, [severe combined immunodeficiencies](#) or other conditions that weaken the immune system we may not be able to vaccinate them.

Our nurses will check your child and family medical history at the clinic and inform you if your child can receive the vaccine or not.

If you have any concerns, please call the BCG service before your appointment on 0800 367 224.

### **My child is over five now but was under five when we applied for the vaccine. Is my child able to have a BCG vaccination?**

Your child is now considered at low risk from TB, so is no longer eligible for the vaccine. We are sorry they were unable to receive the vaccine due to disruptions caused by Covid-19.

### **At the BCG vaccination appointment**

#### **Can the nurse give my baby their six week immunisations at the same time?**

We are only able to provide BCG vaccinations for TB.

Your baby's six week immunisations can be given as scheduled by your own family doctor. Speak to them to learn more about other vaccinations your child may need.

#### **My child recently had another vaccination. Can they still get the BCG vaccine?**

We cannot give your child the BCG vaccine if they had a live vaccination (e.g. MMR, Chickenpox/Varicella or Yellow Fever Vaccines) in the four weeks beforehand.

Make sure you book the BCG appointment a minimum of four weeks after they receive any live vaccines. This does not include the rotavirus vaccination, which can be given at any time.

#### **Can my child be vaccinated if they are unwell?**

If you or your baby are feeling unwell on the day of the BCG appointment then you will need to reschedule it. Please also stay home if you or your child have COVID-19 symptoms, have tested positive for COVID-19, or are isolating as household contacts.

**immunise**

their best protection

Please contact the BCG clinic as soon as you can on the day on 0800 367 224. This is available 8am – 4.30pm Monday to Friday.

### **My child recently had COVID-19 – can they still receive the vaccine?**

If your child has recovered from Covid-19 they are able to have their BCG immunisation. If you or your child are still isolating because of COVID-19 you will need to reschedule your appointment.

### **My child has recently had chickenpox or measles. Can they still have the BCG Vaccine?**

If your child has had chickenpox or measles, please wait for one month before getting a BCG vaccination.

## **After the appointment**

### **Will my baby have any side effects from the vaccination?**

- Most children do not have any immediate reaction to the vaccination. Around one to six weeks after they receive the vaccine a small red blister will appear at the place where they had the injection. This will heal in a few weeks. After six to twelve weeks, the blister may turn into a small, weeping sore. If this happens, cover the site with gauze to allow air to get in (do not use sticking plasters).
- The sore may take up to three months to heal, and often leaves a small scar. This is normal.

At your appointment the nurse will tell you about common reactions to the vaccine and anything unusual to watch out for. More information on what to do following your appointment is available from [Health Ed](#).

### **How soon after being vaccinated are children protected?**

Your child should start producing protective antibodies within the first one to two weeks of the vaccine being given.

The BCG vaccine will be protective four weeks after they have received the BCG vaccine. BCG works by preventing serious illness and death from TB.

If your child will be visiting a country with a high incidence of TB before the end of four weeks they should avoid contact with people who are sick, coughing or unwell with fevers.

### **How long will the BCG vaccine protective effect last?**

The protective effect of this vaccine normally lasts 10 to 15 years.

The logo for 'immunise' features the word in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font inside a dark green oval. The oval is set against a background of a horizontal bar with segments in purple, blue, red, and green.

**immunise**

their best protection