

Rotavirus

Immunisation information

The National Immunisation Program Schedule provides free oral rotavirus vaccine to infants aged two, four and six months of age.

Rotavirus

Rotavirus is the most common cause of severe gastroenteritis in infants and young children in Australia.

Children can be infected with rotavirus several times during their lives, and almost every child will suffer at least one infection by the age of three years. It is easily spread from one child to the next. Symptoms range from mild, watery diarrhoea to severe, dehydrating diarrhoea with vomiting, fever, and shock.

Rotavirus infections are often more severe than other causes of diarrhoea. They are more likely to be associated with dehydration and require treatment in hospital. Confirmation of rotavirus infection can only be made by laboratory testing of faecal specimens.

In Australia, it is estimated in children less than five years of age that there are approximately 10,000 hospitalisations, 115,000 GP visits, 22,000 emergency department visits and one death due to rotavirus each year.

Oral rotavirus immunisation

Oral rotavirus vaccine is the best way to protect infants and children against rotavirus disease. The vaccine will not prevent diarrhoea and vomiting caused by other infections but is very good at preventing severe diarrhoea and vomiting caused by rotavirus.

In Victoria the oral (swallowed by mouth) rotavirus vaccine used is called RotaTeq[®]. RotaTeq[®] is a 'live' weakened virus vaccine. The vaccination course of RotaTeq[®] consists of three doses and is recommended to be given at the same time as other vaccines included on the National Immunisation Program at two, four and six months of age.

The first dose of RotaTeq[®] should be given no later than 12 weeks of age and the third dose should be given by 32 weeks of age.

There is a small chance of catching a rotavirus infection even after receiving the vaccine. However, if this happens, it would usually be a much milder illness than if your child had not been immunised.

The currently licensed rotavirus vaccines have undergone some of the largest and most stringent testing in clinical trials ever seen for any vaccine. In the late 1990s a different type of rotavirus vaccine was used. This vaccine was found to be associated with an uncommon type of bowel obstruction called 'intussusception', and was taken off the market. The new rotavirus vaccine has been tested with more than 70,000 children and has not been associated with intussusception.

Pre-immunisation checklist

Before your infant is immunised, tell the doctor or nurse if any of the following apply:

- Is outside the recommended age range for the first and third dose
- Is unwell on the day of immunisation (temperature over 38.5C)
- Has had a severe reaction to any vaccine
- Is allergic to anything
- Is taking steroids of any sort other than inhaled asthma sprays or steroid creams (for example cortisone or prednisone)
- Has received a recent blood transfusion or blood products, including immunoglobulins
- Has had a vaccine containing live viruses within the last month (for example BCG)
- Has a disease or is having treatment which causes low immunity (for example, leukaemia, cancer, HIV/AIDS, radiotherapy or chemotherapy)
- Lives with someone who has a disease or is having treatment which causes low immunity (for example, leukaemia, cancer, HIV/AIDS, radiotherapy or chemotherapy)

Possible side effects of oral rotavirus vaccine

The rotavirus vaccine is generally well tolerated. Reactions to the rotavirus vaccine are much less frequent than the likelihood of the disease and include:

Common side effects:

- Fever
- Diarrhoea
(in the week after rotavirus vaccination)
- Vomiting
(in the week after rotavirus vaccination)

Extremely rare side effect:

- Anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction)

Further information

The following websites offer resources and further information

www.health.vic.gov.au/immunisation

www.immunise.health.gov.au

Immunise Australia Program

Telephone: 1800 671 811



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