Protecting your baby against rotavirus

Are there any babies who shouldn’t have the vaccination?
As set out above, the first vaccination should not be given after 15 weeks of age and no vaccination should be given after 24 weeks.
The vaccination should not be given to babies who:
• have reacted very badly to a previous dose of the vaccine, or to any of the substances that go into the vaccine
• have certain long-term conditions – in which case speak to your GP first
• have a fever, diarrhoea or are vomiting on the day of the appointment, in which cases the visit should be rearranged.

My baby was premature. When should they have the vaccine?
As with all vaccinations, the immunisation schedule should be followed from the actual date of birth, not from the date when the baby was due.

Is it OK to breast-feed my baby after they have the vaccination?
Yes. There are no problems associated with breast-feeding babies who have recently had the rotavirus vaccine.

Will the vaccine stop babies getting any sickness and diarrhoea?
No. Rotavirus isn’t the only cause of sickness and diarrhoea in babies, so some may still get unwell. However, the vaccine will stop about eight out of ten babies getting vomiting and diarrhoea caused by rotavirus. And the more babies that have the vaccine, the more difficult it will be for the virus to spread.

Where can I find more information?
To find out more, talk to your GP, health visitor or practice nurse at any time or pick up a more detailed leaflet or Q&A factsheet from your GP surgery. You can also go to the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk/rotavirus-vaccine

© Crown copyright 2013
Produced by Williams Lea for Public Health England
First published April 2013

The text of this document may be reproduced without formal permission or charge for personal or in-house use.

To order more copies of this leaflet visit www.orderline.dh.gov.uk or phone: 0300 123 1002
Minicom: 0300 123 1003 (8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday)

www.nhs.uk/vaccinations
From 1 July 2013, the routine childhood immunisation schedule will include a vaccine to protect babies against rotavirus infection – a common cause of diarrhoea and vomiting that can become serious.

This flyer describes the disease and the vaccine that protects against it.

What is rotavirus?
Rotavirus is an infection that causes vomiting and diarrhoea in thousands of young babies every year. Most babies recover at home but, in a small number of cases, rotavirus infection can become serious, with babies getting dehydrated (losing body fluids) and possibly needing hospital treatment.

How is rotavirus spread?
Rotavirus spreads easily through hand to mouth contact and can be picked up from surfaces such as toys, hands or dirty nappies. It can also be spread through the air by sneezing and coughing. Washing hands and keeping surfaces clean can help reduce the spread of the virus but will never completely stop it. Vaccination is a much more effective way to protect babies from getting infected.

When will my baby have the vaccination?
If your baby was born on or after 1 May 2013 he or she will be offered the vaccine from 1 July. The vaccine will be given with his or her other routine vaccinations at two months of age and again at three months. Your baby needs two rotavirus vaccinations at least four weeks apart to get the best protection.

If he or she misses one of the vaccinations, it can also be given at two and four months of age, or at three and four months.

The first dose of the vaccination will not be given to babies over 15 weeks of age and no vaccine will be given to babies over 24 weeks of age. They can have the second dose if they had their first dose before 15 weeks.

Why can’t older babies have the vaccine?
As they get older, some babies – about one in a thousand – get a condition that causes a blockage in their lower gut. It is extremely rare before three months of age and most cases occur between five months and a year. In addition, there is a very small chance (around two in every hundred thousand babies vaccinated) that the first dose of the vaccine might also cause this blockage to develop. To reduce the risk of this happening, the first dose of the vaccine will not be given to babies older than 15 weeks of age.

How is the vaccine given?
Rotavirus vaccine is given as a liquid from a dropper to make it easy for your baby to swallow.

What if my baby spits out the vaccine or vomits immediately after having it?
The drops will be given again.

Will my baby get the rotavirus disease from having the vaccine?
No. The virus in the vaccine is weakened so it doesn’t cause the disease. The vaccine helps your baby build up immunity, so the next time he or she comes into contact with the virus they will not get the disease.

Because the vaccine is given by mouth, it’s possible that the virus in the vaccine will pass through your baby’s gut and be picked up by whoever changes his or her nappy. All those in close contact with recently vaccinated infants should observe good personal hygiene (e.g. washing their hands after changing a child’s nappy).

What if my baby is ill on the day the vaccination is due?
There is no reason to postpone the appointment unless your baby is seriously ill, is vomiting or has diarrhoea, or has a fever. If your baby is well enough to have the other routine vaccines, he or she can have the rotavirus vaccine.

Does the vaccine have any side effects?
Many millions of doses of the vaccine have been used and it has a good safety record. Babies who have had the vaccine can sometimes become restless and tetchy, and some may even develop mild diarrhoea.

In very rare cases (about two in every hundred thousand babies vaccinated), the vaccine can affect the baby’s lower gut and they may develop abdominal pain, vomiting, and sometimes they may pass what looks like redcurrant jelly in their nappies. If this happens, you should contact your doctor immediately.