



**Protect your child
with the BCG
vaccine**

What is the BCG vaccine?

BCG is a vaccine that helps protect people against TB (tuberculosis). It is especially good at preventing the most severe types of TB in children, like TB that affects the brain – this is called TB meningitis. We give the vaccine as an injection just under the skin of your child's upper arm.

What is TB (Tuberculosis)?

TB (tuberculosis) is an infection caused by bacteria (germs). TB spreads through the air, and you can get TB when someone with TB in their lungs coughs, sneezes or spits.

TB mainly affects the lungs, but it can affect other parts of the body. Young children are more likely to get TB in other parts of the body, like the brain (TB meningitis). TB is usually treatable with the right medicines, but treatment takes a long time.



Who needs the BCG vaccine

The BCG vaccine is recommended only for children who are most at risk of TB. In Ireland, most children do not need the BCG vaccine because TB is now uncommon.

We offer BCG to children under 12 months of age who are at a higher risk of coming into contact with TB. These children are those who are under 12 months of age and who:

- live with someone who was born in a country with high TB rates.
- were born in or lived for more than 3 months in a country with high TB rates and have not had the BCG vaccine already.
- were born to parents or in regular contact with people who have untreated TB.

You can find all countries with high TB rates by visiting the World Health Organization website:

- www.who.int/health-topics/tuberculosis

Sometimes public health doctors may advise that other children also need the BCG vaccine.

If you are unsure if your baby should get the vaccine, ask your doctor or nurse: “Does my baby need the BCG vaccine?”

Who should not get the BCG vaccine?

Some children should not get the BCG vaccine. The nurse or doctor will talk to you before vaccination to make sure your baby is suitable for the BCG vaccine.

If you answer 'Yes' to any of these questions, your baby should probably **not** get the BCG vaccine. Ask the nurse or doctor.

	Yes	No
Has your baby already had the BCG vaccine?		
Has your baby been diagnosed with TB?		
Has your baby been exposed to TB and are they waiting for tests to see if they have been infected?		
Does your baby have a weak immune system because of a medical condition or medication?		
Does your baby or the baby's mother have HIV?		
While pregnant, did your baby's mother take medication that weakens the immune system?		
If your baby is less than 3 months old, did their mother receive high-dose steroids during pregnancy?		
Is your baby breastfed and is their mother on medication that causes a weak immune system?		
Has your baby had a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) to any of the ingredients in the BCG vaccine?		
Does your baby have any blood disorders or cancers?		
Does your baby have an infected skin condition?		

If your child is unwell, delay getting the vaccine

If your child is unwell with a high temperature (over 38 degrees Celsius), you should postpone the BCG vaccine until your child is well.

How is BCG given?

BCG is given as an injection in the child's left upper arm.

Before vaccination

Heel prick test for babies

Parents of all babies born in Ireland are offered a heel prick test for their babies within a week of their birth.

The parents of babies who move to Ireland when their babies are under 12 months of age are also offered a heel prick test for their babies.



This test checks for some serious medical conditions including conditions that affect the immune system. We need to check the result of this test before we can give your baby the BCG vaccination.

Test if your baby or older child may have been exposed to TB

Your baby should have a test before receiving the BCG vaccine if they:

- were born in a country with high TB rates.
- lived in a country with high TB rates for more than 3 months.
- are a contact of an untreated TB case.

This test checks whether they have already been infected with TB.

Do I have to delay getting the other childhood vaccines if my child gets BCG?

No. We can give childhood vaccines at any time after the BCG vaccine. You should not delay arranging them for your child.

If an older child needs another vaccine within 3 months of having BCG, they should get the vaccine in the other arm.

What are common side effects after the BCG vaccine?

After the injection your child may have:

- a small lump where the injection was given (injection site).
- redness or soreness at the injection site.
- the injection site may ooze for a while – it can take several weeks or sometimes months for the injection site to heal completely.
- a tiny scar after healing.

19 of out 20 children will have these side effects. They are normal and show the vaccine is working. Take a look at the photos on the next page to see what these common side effects may look like and how a scar develops.



What do these side effects look like?

BCG vaccination reaction and scar development

1

Painless red, raised bump.

Normal:
2-4 weeks.



2

Bump softens, oozes pus, then crusts over.

Normal:
6-8 weeks.



3

Sore heals and leaves a scar.

Normal:
2-4 months.



If you are worried after your child's vaccine, contact your vaccinator.

What are less common side effects?

Other side effects of the BCG vaccine that are less common may include:

- a high temperature (over 38 degrees Celsius).
- a swollen gland in the armpit.
- a larger sore at the injection site that takes longer to heal.

How should I care for my child after the vaccine?

- You should allow the injection site on your child's arm to dry.
- Try to prevent friction on the injection site – for example avoid putting tight clothes on over it to reduce rubbing against it.
- If your child's injection site oozes, you may put a dry dressing on it until a scab forms – but let the wound have times when it is uncovered to allow the air to speed up healing.

Washing and swimming

You do not need to protect the site from getting wet during washing or having a bath. If you want to bring your child swimming, put a waterproof plaster over the injection site during swimming only. If this type of dressing is left on too long, it may delay healing and lead to your child having a larger scar.

If you are concerned about your child, the information you received at the vaccination appointment explains who to contact during office hours, Monday to Friday. If you need medical advice outside these hours, please contact your GP (doctor).

You can also find links to the patient information leaflets for the vaccine at www.hpra.ie. Search for BCG vaccine to read the relevant information.

If you think you or your child have had a side effect after receiving a vaccine, you can report it to the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) at <http://www.hpra.ie>. Your doctor, nurse, pharmacist or a family member can also report the side effect to the HPRA.

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