

## Rotavirus vaccine (Rotarix)

### **Keep your child safe.**

### **Get all vaccines on time.**

By getting all the vaccines on time, your child can be protected from many diseases over a lifetime.

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

### **What is the rotavirus vaccine?**

The rotavirus vaccine helps protect babies against diarrhea and vomiting caused by rotavirus. It does not protect against diarrhea and vomiting caused by other viruses. The vaccine contains a weakened form of rotavirus. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

The rotavirus vaccine is provided free as part of your child's routine immunizations. Call your health care provider to make an appointment.

### **Who should get the vaccine?**

Babies get the rotavirus vaccine as a series of 2 doses at 2 and 4 months of age. The vaccine is given at the same time as other childhood immunizations.

It is important that your baby gets the rotavirus vaccine on time. The first dose of the vaccine must be given before 20 weeks of age and the second dose by 8 months of age. Two doses of the vaccine are needed for best protection.

It is important to keep a record of all immunizations received.

### **How is the vaccine given?**

The rotavirus vaccine is given by mouth. A few drops of the vaccine are placed into your baby's mouth to swallow.

The virus from the vaccine may be found in your baby's stool for at least 10 days after immunization. Parents and caregivers should wash their hands thoroughly after changing diapers.

### **What are the benefits of the vaccine?**

The vaccine prevents more than 3 out of 4 cases of rotavirus disease, and almost all severe cases, including hospitalizations. When you get your child immunized you help protect others as well.

### **What are the possible reactions after the vaccine?**

Vaccines are very safe. It is much safer for your baby to get the vaccine than to get a rotavirus infection.

Most babies do not have any reactions after they get the vaccine. Some may be irritable, have diarrhea, stomach pain, gas or an itchy rash.

There is a very rare risk of intussusception (a blockage of the intestine) in the week after the first or second dose of the vaccine. The risk of intussusception is about 1 to 2 cases for every 100,000 babies that get the vaccine. At most, this could affect one baby a year in B.C. By comparison, each year in B.C. about 1 in 4,000 children under the age of one get intussusception without having received the vaccine.

Signs of intussusception may include a swollen abdomen, frequent vomiting and bloody stools. Your baby could seem weak and irritable and have several bouts of intense crying. If your baby shows these signs, you should take your baby to the nearest emergency department.

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine. There is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This happens in less than one in a million people who get the vaccine. Symptoms may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this reaction occurs, your health care provider is prepared to treat it. Emergency treatment includes administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) and transfer by ambulance to the nearest emergency department. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call **9-1-1** or the local emergency number.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen\* (e.g. Advil®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye syndrome.

\*Ibuprofen should not be given to children under 6 months of age without first speaking to your health care provider.

For more information on Reye syndrome, visit [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye syndrome](#).

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

### Who should not get the vaccine?

Talk to your health care provider if your baby:

- Had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of rotavirus vaccine or any part of the vaccine
- Has an immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
- Has a family history of weakened immune systems
- Had intussusception or has an intestinal disorder that may result in intussusception

Babies who have moderate or severe diarrhea or vomiting, or a serious illness, should not be immunized until they have recovered.

There is no need to delay getting immunized because of a cold or other mild illness. However, if you have concerns, speak with your health care provider.

### What is rotavirus?

Rotavirus is a virus that causes gastroenteritis (vomiting and diarrhea) sometimes called stomach flu. Rotavirus is the most common cause of diarrhea and hospitalization for diarrhea in children under 5 years of age. Almost all unimmunized children will have at least one rotavirus infection before they are 5 years of age.

The first symptoms of rotavirus infection are often fever and vomiting, followed by diarrhea and stomach pain. These symptoms appear 1 to 3 days after infection. Diarrhea can last from 4 to 8 days. Young children can become dehydrated if diarrhea or vomiting is severe and happens often. If this is not treated, the child may die.

Rotavirus is easily spread by touching the stools of an infected child. This can happen when handling diapers. Wash your hands often with soap and water to prevent the spread of rotavirus. A child who is sick with diarrhea or vomiting should not go to day care or have contact with other children until 48 hours after the diarrhea or vomiting has stopped. For tips on hand washing, visit [HealthLinkBC File #85 Hand washing: Help stop the spread of germs](#).



BC Centre for Disease Control  
Provincial Health Services Authority

---

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca/health-library/healthlinkbc-files](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca/health-library/healthlinkbc-files) or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca) or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.