



BCG (Bacillus Calmette Guerin) Vaccine

Tuberculosis (TB) is a slow, progressive disease due to a bacteria – Mycobacterium Tuberculosis – whose complications can result in life long disability and even death. BCG vaccine protects against severe forms of Tuberculosis like TB meningitis and Miliary TB.

Why is BCG vaccine given to all children at birth? – As India has very high burden of Tuberculosis, so protection must begin as early as possible. Hence BCG is given to all children soon after birth.

Can BCG be given at other sites for cosmetic purposes? – It is recommended to be given only in left upper arm, to maintain uniformity.

What is the natural reaction that develops at the site of BCG vaccination? – A tiny red raised spot will appear at the site of BCG vaccination 2-3 weeks after vaccination. It increases in size by 5 weeks and then may either subside or break into shallow ulcer by 6-12 weeks. This will heal on its own and leave a characteristic scar - “mark of BCG” vaccine. This usually doesn't need treatment.

What to do if scar does not appear after BCG vaccine? – Scar is only an indicator of successful vaccination, and not a marker of protection against TB. Body might develop protection even in absence of scar. If there is doubt regarding the same, the BCG vaccine can be repeated once; but there is no need to repeat after that even if there is no scar.

What are the adverse reactions to BCG vaccine? BCG is a safe vaccine and is therefore recommended to all children at birth. Rarely reaction in the form of lymphadenopathy (swelling of lymph glands) or lymphangitis may occur in 1 per 1million children.

Which children should not receive BCG vaccine? – Children born with severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID), HIV, Leukemia, generalized malignancy and children on immunosuppression or steroids should not take BCG vaccine. Also, babies of mothers on chemotherapy who are exposed to immunosuppressive medicines in-utero or through breast milk, should not be given BCG vaccination.

If a child has not received BCG vaccine at birth, can the baby be given the same now? – IAP recommends catch-up vaccination for BCG up to 5 years of age.

(Edited by Dr. Sanket Kale)