

Vaccination of employees: rotavirus

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Executive summary

Health Council of the Netherlands



Vaccinating employees can help protect them against disease when they are exposed to viruses and bacteria in the course of their work. Sometimes the employees themselves do not face a particularly high risk, but they can infect others with whom they come into contact, such as vulnerable patients or young children. Vaccination may provide a solution in this situation too. The Health Council has developed two assessment frameworks to decide whether to recommend worker vaccination. Using these frameworks, the Subcommittee Vaccination of Employees has assessed whether employees should be vaccinated against rotavirus.

The rotavirus vaccines available in the Netherlands are registered for use in very young children. Using them for employees, who most often are adults, would therefore be off-label use. This can sometimes be necessary to ensure a safe and healthy environment for employees and the vulnerable groups with whom they come into contact in the course of their duties.

Rotavirus can cause vomiting and diarrhoea. Infections in very young children can be serious. In 2021, the Health Council recommended that all children be vaccinated against rotavirus. In adults, an infection is usually mild or can even be asymptomatic. Due to previous infections, most adults are protected against disease from rotavirus, serious or otherwise. The virus is extremely contagious and is easily transmitted.

Employees in settings such as childcare centres, special education and healthcare institutions have a higher risk of exposure to rotavirus, due to close contact and because children shed the virus more than adults. However, due to widespread immunity among adults, the subcommittee estimates that these employees do not have a significantly higher risk of contracting the disease than the general population. Consequently, the Health Council sees no reason to vaccinate employees against rotavirus for their own protection.

After a natural infection with rotavirus, adults can still become infected and transmit the virus to others, even if they themselves do not become ill. If employees in sectors such as special education, health care or child care transmit the virus to children it can lead to a significant burden of disease, particularly among very young children in high-risk groups. However, the Health Council does not believe that worker vaccination would protect these children. Children can still transmit the virus after vaccination, and the same is probably true for adults. In this situation, the protection of third parties is therefore not a reason to vaccinate employees. The Health Council therefore recommends that vaccination against rotavirus should not be offered to employees.



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