

Information about whooping cough (pertussis)

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a highly infectious disease that is spread by coughing and sneezing. It can be very serious for babies and children, especially those under one year of age.

If you or your child has whooping cough symptoms get help. Contact your doctor or practice nurse, or call Healthline for free anytime on 0800 611 116.



Signs and symptoms – what you can see and feel

Whooping cough symptoms include:



Cough



Fever



Runny nose

The cough turns into long coughing attacks and these can last for several weeks. In young children, the coughing attacks often end with a 'whoop' sound when the child breathes in. The child may also be sick or gag as a result of the coughing.

Whooping cough is spread by coughing and sneezing. You can pass it on to others from the week before your cough starts up until three weeks after. Antibiotics can reduce the amount of time you are infectious.



How to protect yourself and your child against whooping cough

Vaccination is the best way to protect against whooping cough. In New Zealand the vaccine is free for:

- Children and young people aged under 18
- Pregnant women
- Some groups at higher risk of becoming very unwell if they catch whooping cough
- Adults aged 45 and over if they previously missed any routine immunisation doses or boosters
- Adults aged 65 and over

Babies should be given the whooping cough vaccine at six weeks, three months and five months old, as part of the Immunisation Schedule. Boosters are also given to children at four and 11 years old.

If you or your child have missed out on getting the whooping cough vaccine you should speak to your healthcare provider about catching up.



Seeking medical advice

If someone in your family has had a cough that ends with a whoop or vomiting, or that has lasted for two weeks or more, contact your doctor or nurse for advice. You can also call Healthline for free anytime on 0800 611 116.

If you or your child has difficulty breathing you should get emergency medical help. Call 111.



What happens if you catch whooping cough

Whooping cough spreads very easily so people with the disease are required to stay home to reduce the risk of passing it on to others.

People are required to stay home for up to three weeks from when their coughing started. If they take antibiotic treatments this time will reduce to two - five days.

Staying home means you need to stay away from other people while you are infectious. You should avoid places such as day care, school, work or anywhere you could risk passing on the disease to others.

If you have whooping cough you can reduce the risk of passing on the disease while you are infectious by:

- Staying away from others, including people you live with where possible
- Wearing a face mask when around other people or indoors
- Coughing into your elbow and sneezing into a tissue
- Regularly washing your hands

If there are people in your whānau at higher risk of becoming very unwell from whooping cough, then everyone you live with may be provided with antibiotics.



How to keep your baby safe against whooping cough

Young children – especially babies under a year old – can become very ill and even die from whooping cough.

The best protection against whooping cough is for you and others in your whānau to be vaccinated.

You and other people who care for your baby should check with a doctor about getting vaccinated.

You can also reduce the risk of your baby catching whooping cough by:

- Keeping your baby away from people with a runny nose, coughing, or sneezing
- Asking people who are ill not to visit if you have young children
- Encouraging others in your whānau to get vaccinated
- Encouraging people who come into contact with your baby to cough into their elbow and sneeze into a tissue; and regularly wash their hands and practice good hygiene



If you're pregnant or planning a child

Whooping cough in newborn babies can be life-threatening, but it can also be prevented.

Pregnant women can be vaccinated from week 16 of their pregnancy to protect themselves and their child against whooping cough.

This vaccine helps the mother build up their immune system against whooping cough, and this protection is also passed on to the child while they are in their womb. New-born babies should still receive the vaccine at six weeks, three months, and five months old as well.

If you're pregnant or planning a child talk to your midwife about immunisation against whooping cough.



For more information visit:
info.health.nz/whooping-cough