

Pertussis (whooping cough)

Information Sheet

Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand

Population Health | Te Whatu Ora Te Matau a Māui Hawke's Bay | 76 Wellesley Road,
PO Box 447, Napier | Phone: 06 834 1815 | Fax: 06 834 1816 | www.ourhealthhb.nz

Whooping (pronounced as hooping) cough is a very infectious disease that causes coughing fits. It is caused by a bacteria that is easily spread by coughing and sneezing. You can be immunised against it. Whooping cough is also known as Pertussis.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The symptoms of whooping cough generally appear around one week after infection. Whooping cough can last up to three months, and there are usually three stages. The first stage is like a cold. You are infectious, and it lasts one to two weeks.

You may have a:

- runny nose
- slight fever
- mild cough

The second stage begins after one to two weeks.

You have:

- coughing fits which can end in a high-pitched sound as you take a breath. This is called a "whoop"
- vomiting after coughing
- tiredness from coughing fits

This stage usually lasts two to three weeks, but can last up to ten weeks.

The third stage is the recovery stage. During this time the cough slowly gets better and disappears. Sometimes the coughing can start again if you get a cold.

How serious is it?

Whooping cough can be very serious in babies and young children, especially those who are not fully immunised. They can stop breathing and turn blue during coughing fits, get pneumonia (a lung infection), convulsions (uncontrolled shaking) or brain damage. Most babies under 1 year old with whooping cough will need to go to hospital. A few will need to go to the intensive care unit. 1 of every 100 babies with whooping cough will die.

Teenagers and adults can also get complications like pneumonia, but whooping cough is usually less serious in these ages, especially if you have been immunised. People with heart or lung problems or with immune system problems are more at risk of complications.

Pertussis (whooping cough)

Information Sheet

Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand

Population Health | Te Whatu Ora Te Matau a Māui Hawke's Bay | 76 Wellesley Road,
PO Box 447, Napier | Phone: 06 834 1815 | Fax: 06 834 1816 | www.ourhealthhb.nz

Who is most at risk?

Babies who have not yet been immunised, or young children who are not immunised or only partially immunised are most at risk from whooping cough.

How could I get infected?

Whooping cough is very infectious. It can be spread in the air by an infected person, especially by coughing and sneezing. Many babies who get whooping cough are infected by older children or caregivers who may not know they have it. People are most infectious until about three weeks after the cough begins. How do I protect myself and others?

How do I protect myself and others?

Immunisation offers the best protection against whooping cough. It is never too late for your or your whānau to be immunised.

The whooping cough vaccine is free for:

- children and young people under 18
- pregnant women
- people at higher risk of becoming very unwell from whooping cough
- adults aged 45 and over if they previously missed any routine whooping cough immunisation doses or boosters
- adults aged 65 and over

Protection from this immunisation decreases over time, and people can get whooping cough years after their last immunisation or infection. Because babies are most at risk, pregnant women should get a whooping cough booster vaccine for free from the second trimester of pregnancy, in every pregnancy. The mother can then pass her immunity on to her baby to help protect them until they are old enough to be immunised themselves.

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.

Other adults can have booster vaccinations for a cost, if you work with, care for or live with babies under 1 year old.

Speak to your doctor about you and your whānau getting the vaccine.

It is also important to keep your baby away from anyone with a cough, and if you have a cough yourself – stay away from babies. If you have a cough that won't go away, see your doctor. Your doctor can do a swab test for whooping cough.

Pertussis (whooping cough)

Information Sheet

Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand

Population Health | Te Whatu Ora Te Matau a Māui Hawke's Bay | 76 Wellesley Road,
PO Box 447, Napier | Phone: 06 834 1815 | Fax: 06 834 1816 | www.ourhealthhb.nz

If you have whooping cough:

- Stay at home until you are no longer infectious. You will be infectious from the time you become unwell until 3 weeks after the start of your coughing fits
- Stay away from babies, children, pregnant women, people with long term illness or weak immune systems, and social gatherings
- Finish all the antibiotics you are given. You will not be infectious after five days of antibiotics, but it is important you finish the antibiotics to stop the infection coming back
- Cover coughs and sneezes. Throw used tissues in the rubbish
- Wash and dry your hands often with soap and water.

A nurse from Te Whatu Ora will get in touch with you if you have had contact with an infected person and explain what you should do to protect yourself and others.

If you are pregnant or have young children and have not been immunised for whooping cough, ask your doctor or nurse about being immunised. To find out if you or a member of your family is fully immunised you can check your Well Child / Tamariki Ora book. You can also ask your doctor or nurse to help you find out.

Will I need to take time off work, school or preschool?

If you have whooping cough you will need to stay home until you are no longer infectious. This will be until three weeks after your coughing fits started or after you have taken five days of antibiotics for whooping cough.

How is it treated?

Whooping cough is normally treated with antibiotics at home. It is important that you finish all of the antibiotics you are given to stop the illness coming back. If you find out you have whooping cough after many weeks or months, you will probably not be given antibiotics as you will no longer be infectious.

Drinking plenty of fluids, rest, paracetamol for fever or pain, saline nose drops and steam may help with your symptoms. Keep away from things that trigger coughing, like cigarette smoke.

Where can I get more information?

For further information on whooping cough please contact your doctor or Te Whatu Ora Hawke's Bay Population Health on (06) 834 1815. You can also phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 at any time of the day or night to speak to a registered nurse.

For more information on immunisation go to www.immune.org.nz.