



WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS) VACCINE FOR PARENTS

This information is for women who are planning pregnancy, are pregnant or have recently given birth.

Most adults are not adequately vaccinated for whooping cough.

We strongly recommend that parents, other adult household members, grandparents and carers of your baby are vaccinated against whooping cough (pertussis).

For women, a whooping cough booster is recommended during the third trimester of each pregnancy. This vaccine is free.

Other adults in contact with your baby (other parent, grandparents, etc.) should also receive a booster if 10 years have passed since their previous dose. The vaccine is also free for the parents of babies under six months.

Did you know?

- » Australia is currently experiencing an epidemic of whooping cough.
- » Approximately **1 in every 200** children infected with whooping cough, under the age of six months, will die.
- » Most babies get whooping cough from their parents.
- » Immunisation for whooping cough is very effective, but babies are at a higher risk of infection until their third dose of the primary vaccine at six months.
- » Immunisation during the third trimester of each pregnancy will provide protection for the baby from passive maternal antibody in the first six months until the routine three doses of childhood pertussis vaccine are complete.

Whooping cough in babies is very serious with many babies requiring hospitalisation.

Protecting yourself and others that care for your baby against whooping cough lessens the chance that your baby will get it.

For information on whooping cough please see the fact sheet on the back of this page.

Whooping cough (pertussis) information for parents

What is whooping cough?

- » A highly infectious disease that damages respiratory passages.
- » Produces severe spasms of coughing sometimes resulting in gasping for breath (the whoop).
- » Coughing spasms may be followed by vomiting.
- » The cough can last for months.
- » Infants less than six months and adults often do not have the characteristic whoop.
- » It is caused by a bacteria – *Bordetella pertussis*

How is whooping cough spread?

- » By respiratory droplets.
- » Parents and family are the main sources of infections for babies.

When is whooping cough infectious?

- » The incubation period is about 14 days (between day 6 and 20 after exposure).
- » It is highly infectious in the early stage **before** the cough develops.
- » People are no longer infectious after three weeks, even though the cough persists.
- » Appropriate antibiotics can decrease the infectious period to five days or less.

Who is affected by whooping cough?

- » Babies less than six months are most susceptible.
- » All three whooping cough vaccinations are necessary to provide the best protection. Any child who has received less than three doses is at risk of developing whooping cough.
- » **The vaccine is 70–80 percent effective**, so people immunised against whooping cough can still contract the disease but are likely to have a less severe illness.
- » Anyone in your household who is not immunised or not immune has a 70–100 percent chance of getting whooping cough if they are exposed.
- » A child in school who is not immunised or not immune has a 50-80 percent chance of being infected if they are exposed.

Immunity to whooping cough is achieved by vaccination or exposure to the disease. To maintain immunity all adults should have repeat vaccination every ten years.

How is whooping cough prevented?

- » Immunisation is the best way to minimise the risk of infection. It is strongly recommended for:
 - All children receive the whooping cough vaccination as part of their routine immunisation schedule. Babies are given the primary vaccine doses at two, four and six months. Children receive booster doses at 4 years and in secondary school.
 - Pregnant women in the third trimester of each pregnancy*. For any pregnancy where whooping cough vaccination does not occur, as soon as possible after the baby is born.
- * *An additional dose of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTPa) may be offered at 18 months to infants whose mothers received the whooping cough vaccination during pregnancy. This will minimise the likelihood of the child developing whooping cough in the second and third years of life. This dose is not included in the immunisation schedule.*
- Other adults in contact with your baby (other parent, grandparents, etc.) should also receive a booster if 10 years have passed since their previous dose.
- Any adult wishing to protect themselves against whooping cough.
- » Antibiotics have little effect on the clinical course of disease but can reduce the risk of transmission if commenced within 21 days of cough onset.
- » All whooping cough cases should be considered infectious until five days after commencing antibiotics.

Vaccine

(dTpa; diphtheria-tetanus-acellular pertussis – **Boostrix®/Adacel®** vaccine)

- » Contains lower concentrations of diphtheria and pertussis antigens than infant and childhood DTPa vaccines.
- » Acellular vaccines are significantly less likely to cause adverse reactions.

If you have any questions

Talk to your doctor, midwife or nurse.
You can also contact the:

Women's Health Information Centre

Royal Women's Hospital

T: (03) 8345 3045 or 1800 422 007 (rural callers)