

WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS)

VACCINE FOR PARENTS



the women's
the royal women's hospital
victoria australia

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 pregnant mothers, partners, other adult household members, grandparents and carers of your baby are vaccinated against whooping cough (pertussis). It takes two weeks for the vaccine to work.

For pregnant women, a whooping cough booster is recommended from 20 to 32 weeks gestation during each pregnancy regardless of the interval between pregnancies. The vaccine is free and can be given any time up to delivery, or as soon possible after the baby is born if missed during pregnancy.

Partners of pregnant women can be vaccinated at any time during the pregnancy and should preferably receive the vaccine at least 2 weeks before contact with the infant. The vaccine is free for partners of women in their third trimester and up to 6 months after birth, if it is more than 10 years since their previous dose of a pertussis containing vaccine.

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. Those under 3 months are particularly at risk.
- 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 vaccine at six months.
- Immunisation during 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.

What is whooping cough?

- A highly infectious disease that damages respiratory passages. It causes particularly severe infection in infants under 6 months of age.
- 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.
- Appropriate antibiotics can decrease the infectious period if started early in the illness. All whooping cough cases should be considered infectious until five days after commencing antibiotics
- People are no longer infectious after three weeks, even though the cough persists.

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 per cent 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 per cent chance of getting whooping cough if they are exposed.

- A child in school who is not immunised or not immune has a 50-80 per cent 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 6 weeks, 4 and 6 months. Children receive booster doses at 18 months and at 4 years of age and again in secondary school.
 - Pregnant women in each pregnancy (optimally at 20-32 weeks gestation). For any pregnancy where whooping cough vaccination does not occur, the mother should be immunised as soon as possible after the baby is born.
 - 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 free for partners of pregnant women in their third trimester.
 - 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.

Vaccines for children over the age of 10 and adults (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