

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)



Whooping cough (pertussis) is a bacterial infection of the lungs and breathing tubes. It spreads very easily and can sometimes cause serious problems. It's important for babies and children to get vaccinated against it.

Whooping cough can affect people of all ages but for very young infants, it can be particularly serious. However, vaccinating pregnant women is highly effective in protecting babies from birth until they can receive their own vaccines. Parents can also help protect their children by ensuring they receive their vaccines at the right time or catching up as soon as possible if they have missed any. If you're unsure, please check your child's red book or get in touch with your GP surgery.

The whooping cough vaccine is the safest and most effective way for parents to protect their children against whooping cough. However, the whooping cough vaccine is not routinely recommended for those aged 10 years and over, apart from pregnant women or as part of outbreak control.

UKHSA advise a pertussis-containing vaccine can be considered as a post exposure measure for those aged more than 10 years old who have had close contact with suspected or confirmed cases of pertussis.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The first signs of whooping cough are similar to a cold, such as a runny nose and sore throat (a high temperature is uncommon).

After about a week, you or your child:

- will get coughing bouts that last for a few minutes and are worse at night
- may make a "whoop" sound – a gasp for breath between coughs (young babies and some adults may not "whoop")
- may have difficulty breathing after a coughing bout and may turn blue or grey (young infants)
- may bring up a thick mucus, which can make you vomit
- may become very red in the face (more common in adults)

The cough may last for several weeks or months.



IF YOUR CHILD HAS SYMPTOMS OF WHOOPING COUGH RING THE GP OR 111 FOR FURTHER ADVICE. DO NOT TAKE YOUR CHILD STRAIGHT FOR MEDICAL ATTENTION AS THIS PUTS OTHERS AT RISK OF CONTRACTING THE VIRUS

GET VACCINATED

Routine vaccinations are offered for free on the NHS to all babies and children and millions of doses have been given safely in the UK and around the world. All vaccines are thoroughly tested for safety and are continually monitored after they are introduced.

Parents or guardians of children who are not up to date with their whooping cough vaccine should contact their GP practice to book an appointment. If you are unsure of your or your child's vaccination status consult the red book or speak to your GP. **Find out more at [nhs.uk/conditions/whooping-cough/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/whooping-cough/)**



5 THINGS YOU MAY NOT KNOW

1. Whooping cough can be very serious, especially for babies.

Whooping cough can cause serious illness in people of all ages and can even be life threatening, especially in babies.

About one third of babies younger than 1 year old who get whooping cough need care in the hospital, and 1 out of 100 babies who get treatment in the hospital die.

2. Whooping cough is very contagious.

The bacteria that cause whooping cough spread easily from person to person through coughing and sneezing.

Some people have mild symptoms and don't know they have whooping cough, but they can still spread the bacteria that cause it to others, including babies.

3. Severe coughing fits can last for weeks.

Pertussis is known as "whooping cough" because of the "whooping" sound that people can make when gasping for air after a fit of coughing.

Whooping cough can cause rapid, violent, and uncontrolled coughing fits until all air is gone from the lungs. These coughing fits can go on for up to 10 weeks or more.

4. Babies may not cough at all.

Babies may not cough at all. Instead, they may have apnea (life-threatening pauses in breathing) or struggle to breathe.

Any time someone is struggling to breathe, it is important to get them to a doctor right away.

5. Vaccines are the best protection against whooping cough.

The best way to protect you and your loved ones is to stay up to date with recommended whooping cough vaccines.

Two vaccines in the United States help prevent whooping cough: DTaP and Tdap. Children younger than 7 years old get DTaP, while older children, teens, and adults get Tdap.

Women should get a Tdap vaccine during the third trimester of **each pregnancy** to help protect their baby early in life.

FURTHER INFORMATION

[Whooping cough - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[NHS vaccinations and when to have them - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[6-in-1 vaccine - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[Information for individuals diagnosed with whooping cough - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[Whooping cough: vaccination in pregnancy programme resources - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[How long should you keep your child off school - checklist poster \(text version\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)