

Whooping cough (pertussis)

Description

Whooping cough is a bacterial infection, which affects the respiratory system. It is also known as the '100 day cough' because the illness can last a long time.

Whooping cough usually starts with a runny nose and cough lasting one to two weeks. This develops into fits of coughing, which may end with vomiting, or with a 'whooping' sound.

Complications can include pneumonia, ear infections and symptoms related to the effects of coughing. It can be very serious in children under one year of age as it can cause serious complications including brain damage and death.

Adults and older children can also get whooping cough. Sometimes they do not get the classical symptoms of cough with whoop but have an ongoing cough which can be worse at night.

How does it spread?

Whooping cough spreads when someone with the illness coughs or sneezes, spraying droplets of fluid from the nose or throat.

After a person is exposed to the bacteria it usually takes seven to ten days before coughing begins.

Infectious period

A person is most infectious in the early stage of runny nose and irritating cough. Without treatment they continue to be infectious until three weeks after the fits of coughing start.

Antibiotics shorten the infectious period to two days if azithromycin is used, or five days for other appropriate antibiotics.

Exclusion period

Children with whooping cough should not attend their centre for three weeks after they started coughing or five days after starting antibiotic treatment.

Responsibilities of staff

- Tell the parents that there is whooping cough in the centre.
- Display information about whooping cough on your notice board.
- Provide staff with information about the whooping cough booster immunisation.
- Check your immunisation records are up to date.

Responsibilities of parents

- Keep a child with whooping cough away from the centre for three weeks after the child started coughing or five days after starting antibiotic treatment.
- Provide the centre with your child's up to date immunisation record.

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Treatment

If you think you or a family member may have whooping cough, see your doctor as soon as possible.

- You may be given antibiotics. Antibiotics can reduce how long you are infectious for, but unless they are given early, they may not reduce your symptoms.
- Your doctor will also tell you how to care for yourself or your child at home while you are recovering.

Controlling the spread

Vaccination

Immunisation is free and offered at six weeks, three months and five months of age. This is the best way to protect infants against whooping cough.

Can fully vaccinated children get whooping cough?

Yes, when there is a high level of infection in the community even fully vaccinated children can get whooping cough. Vaccinated children may get a milder infection. The vaccines are effective in preventing illness in more than 80% of people. To stop whooping cough going through the community, we need a very high level of vaccination.

For more information about whooping cough contact:

- Healthline on 0800 611 116.
- Regional Public Health Disease Control Team between 8.00am - 4.30pm on 04 570 9002.

Or view these websites:

- www.immune.org.nz
- www.health.govt.nz