



# Don't delay – Immunise for **Whooping Cough**

*Immunisation is FREE*

**6**  
weeks

**3**  
months

**5**  
months

# What is whooping cough?



**Whooping cough (Pertussis)** is a highly contagious bacterial infection that is spread by coughing and sneezing.

## What can happen?

**Whooping cough can be very distressing for your baby, as it can cause severe coughing attacks and may lead to serious complications, like pneumonia and possibly brain damage.**

Coughing attacks are generally followed by a big breath in or a 'whoop', and sometimes vomiting. It is worse for babies under 1 year of age. They are often unable to feed or breathe properly so become very ill and may end up in hospital.

## What are the symptoms?

**Whooping cough is most infectious in the first two weeks.**

Symptoms start just like a common cold – runny nose, sneezing, slight fever and a mild irritating cough. Whooping cough can last up to three months and is sometimes called the 100-day-cough.

People who are infectious should stay away from others, especially babies, young children and women who are pregnant.



# How can we prevent it from spreading?

Aside from immunising your baby on time, there are other steps you can take to help prevent whooping cough from spreading.

## **For children:**

- make sure older children get their free immunisations when they are 4 and 11 years old
- if babies or other family members are showing symptoms of whooping cough, take them to a doctor
- keep babies away from anyone with a cough, even if they and baby are fully immunised.

**“ The best way to protect your baby against whooping cough is to immunise them on time, every time: at 6 weeks, 3 months and 5 months of age. ”**

## **To protect infants, vaccinations are recommended for adults who:**

- live with, care for or work in regular contact with infants under 12 months of age, even if the baby has been fully immunised
- are pregnant, especially in the later stages of pregnancy
- are at high risk of severe illness or complications.

**Talk to your GP or practice nurse.**



# How can I protect my baby?

**The best way to protect your baby against whooping cough is to immunise them on time: at 6 weeks, 3 months and 5 months of age. Then protect them again with immunisations at 4 and 11 years of age.**

If you are pregnant, you can reduce the risk of your baby catching whooping cough by being immunised before, or just after, your baby is born. However, your baby still needs to be immunised on time, every time.

Babies are not well protected from whooping cough until they have had all three doses. Delaying immunisation puts your baby at higher risk of catching the disease.

About 84 percent of babies are fully protected when they have completed the first three doses of the vaccine.

## What about my older children and myself?

**Unlike some other infectious diseases and vaccinations, the immunity to whooping cough decreases with time.**

This means that people can catch whooping cough some years later, even if they have been immunised in the past or have previously had the disease. Many babies catch it from their older siblings or parents, often before they are old enough to be fully immunised.

It is therefore important that adults caring for babies and older siblings are up to date with their immunisations. Being immunised for whooping cough while you are pregnant can also provide added protection for your baby.



# Whooping cough – it's more common than we realise

**If there is one thing that Anna wants parents to think about, it is immunising themselves against whooping cough.**

"It was mentioned to us at our antenatal class but we didn't really pay much attention, as there were so many other things to think about. If we had known what was going to happen, though, we would have definitely given it more thought and made sure we were immunised before Mackenzie was born."

Anna's daughter Mackenzie caught whooping cough from her dad when she was only seven weeks old. After several trips to the doctor, she ended up in hospital for 10 days.

"It was truly awful seeing Mackenzie so ill. She would cough and cough and cough until she was blue and not breathing. We felt so helpless, as there wasn't much we or the hospital staff could do but wait and comfort her.

"It's definitely something we don't want other parents to experience. We could possibly have prevented it if we had both arranged for a booster shot when she was first born. We were lucky, though, as Mackenzie recovered and she has no lasting health problems."



# Make an appointment

**Whooping cough immunisations for children are *free*. Simply make an appointment with your doctor or practice nurse today.**

**If you have questions or concerns about whooping cough or immunisation, you can:**

- talk to your family doctor or practice nurse
- call the Immunisation Advisory Centre  
*free* advisory line on  
**0800 IMMUNE (0800 466 863)**
- visit the Immunisation Advisory Centre website  
**[www.immune.org.nz](http://www.immune.org.nz)**  
or the Ministry of Health website  
**[www.health.govt.nz](http://www.health.govt.nz)**

