



One minute guide to...

Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

What is it?

In recent years, cases of whooping cough (pertussis) have risen sharply across the UK. It is a serious disease caused by a bacterial infection in the lungs or breathing tubes that causes long bouts of coughing and choking, making it hard to breathe. The 'whoop' noise is caused by gasping for breath after each bout of coughing. Young babies and children are most at serious risk from whooping cough and so it is very important for this age group to be vaccinated against the disease.

Symptoms:

The first signs of whooping cough are similar to a cold, such as a runny nose and sore throat. After about a week:

- bouts of coughing last for a few minutes and are worse at night. This cough may last several weeks or months.
- 'whoop' sound (a gasp for breath between coughs) can be heard especially infants.
- difficulty breathing after coughing. Infants may turn blue/grey; adults may be very red in the face.
- bringing up a thick mucus that can cause vomiting.

What to do if you or your child has symptoms:

- NHS recommends to either call your GP (as it spreads so easily) for advice.
- [Check symptoms on 111 online](#) (for children aged 5 and over) or call 111 (under 5yrs).
- Go to A & E or Call 999 if your child has difficulty breathing, chest pain, is grey/blue in colour or has a seizure (fit).

Treatment: Depends on your age and the length of time of infection. Under 3 weeks antibiotics will be given to prevent spread (but symptoms may still be present)

How to ease symptoms (once advice/treatment has been given):

- get plenty of rest.
- drink lots of fluids
- take [paracetamol](#) OR [ibuprofen](#) (not together if under 16yrs) to relieve discomfort

STAY OFF SCHOOL, WORK OR NURSERY UNTIL 48 HOURS AFTER STARTING ANTIBIOTICS, OR 3 WEEKS AFTER YOUR SYMPTOMS STARTED WITH NO ANTIBIOTIC TREATMENT.

Vaccination:

- Get vaccinated during pregnancy – this provides antibodies for protection of your baby during the first few weeks of life when whooping cough is most serious.
- The vaccine (Boostrix IPV that also contains diphtheria/ tetanus/polio and whooping cough) is available from your GP/midwifery team and may be offered it at a routine antenatal appointment from around 16 weeks of your pregnancy. Don't forget to discuss with your midwifery team if you have not been offered it.
- The earliest your baby can receive the vaccine themselves is at two months, as newborn babies do not respond well to the vaccine (and they need 3 doses). Breastfeeding alone will not protect your child from whooping cough before their first injection, as not enough immunity is passed in the breast milk to your baby

Further Information:

NHS: <https://www.nhs.uk/pregnancy/keeping-well/vaccinations/>

UKHSA: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/resources-to-support-whooping-cough-vaccination/whooping-cough-vaccination-in-pregnancy-guide>

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Working for Cumberland Council and Westmorland & Furness Council