

# Whooping cough

**This leaflet is for parents and carers of children with whooping cough. It explains what the condition is, how it will affect your child and how the infection is treated. If you have any questions or concerns that are not answered in the leaflet, please ask a member of nursing staff.**

## What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough is an infection caused by a bacterium (germ) called *Bordetella pertussis*. The bacterium is spread to others by contaminated droplets in the air, produced from coughing and close contact with an affected person.

## Is it contagious?

It is very infectious in the early stage of the illness (the first three weeks). Symptoms develop 5-21 days after being infected. You will normally pass on the infection to most household members who are not immunised (or who have not previously had whooping cough). To try to avoid passing on the infection, cover your mouth when you cough, throw away used tissues immediately and wash your hands regularly.

## How do I know if my child has whooping cough?

The first symptom your child may have is a sore throat. Within the next few days a mild, dry cough develops. Your child will feel unwell and may have a high temperature and runny nose. Over the next few days your child's cough may become more productive with some sputum (phlegm).

After 10-14 days from the start of the illness the cough may become worse and your child will have bouts of intense coughing which can last between 1-2 minutes. It is not uncommon to vomit after coughing.

Your child may have several bouts of coughing throughout the day ranging from 12 times in a day and up to 100 times in a day.

## Who gets whooping cough?

Anyone of any age can get whooping cough, especially children and adults who have not been immunised. Also, some adults who have been immunised can still get whooping cough as the vaccine can lose its efficacy in some people.

## What is the treatment for whooping cough?

Your child may be put on antibiotics, which kills the bacterium that causes whooping cough. The antibiotics will not lessen the duration of the illness. Without the antibiotics your child can be infectious for up to three weeks after the bouts of coughing start. The bouts of coughing then ease gradually over a period which can last up to three months or more.

Unfortunately, there is nothing that has been shown to work to soothe or prevent the coughing bouts.

General measures include:

- General comforting.
- Clearing away any mucus and sick (vomit) during bouts of coughing to prevent them from being inhaled by the child.
- Making sure an ill child is getting enough food and drink.

### **Does my child need to stay off school?**

In the UK, government advice is that children should stay off nursery or school for:

- Two days after starting a course of antibiotics; **OR**
- If not having antibiotics, for three weeks after symptoms start (even if they still have bouts of coughing).

### **Can whooping cough be prevented?**

In the UK, immunisation against whooping cough is offered routinely to all children. It is part of a triple vaccine. Three doses are usually given at the ages of 2, 3, and 4 months and then a pre-school booster at ages 3-5 years.

In order to protect young babies from becoming infected from whooping cough, a programme offering a vaccination to pregnant women started in 2012.

### **Contacting us**

**Paediatric Emergency Department:** 0118 322 6875 / 6876

### **Further information**

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/whooping-cough/pages/introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/whooping-cough/pages/introduction.aspx)

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

RBFT Paediatric ED, January 2023.

Next review due: January 2025