

Whooping cough (pertussis) is an infection of the lungs and breathing tubes. It spreads very easily and can be serious. It's important for babies, children and anyone who's pregnant to get vaccinated against it. Whooping cough is a disease that can cause long bouts of coughing and choking, which can make it hard to breathe. It can be very serious for young children and even fatal for babies under one year old.

Symptoms of whooping cough

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. More information on [pertussis \(whooping cough\)](#) can be found on [nidirect](#).

Key resources:

Information for the public

Find [pertussis \(whooping cough\) information on | nidirect](#).

If you have sought advice or testing

Your local health protection team may contact you with additional advice if you are suspected to have pertussis or have a positive pertussis result.

This could be by phone or by text message. [\[Health Protection Duty Room\]](#)

If you are contacted by text message, ensure that you read all the advice contained in the message and seek further advice if needed.

Vaccination

The whooping cough vaccination programme for pregnant women began in 2012 in response to an outbreak of whooping cough across the UK. The vaccine is given to pregnant women as they can pass antibodies to their babies to protect them in the first few weeks of life – when they are particularly vulnerable to infection. All women who are 16 weeks pregnant or more should be offered the vaccine by their GP.

The age at which pregnant women can be offered the vaccine was lowered from 28 weeks to 16 weeks gestation in May 2016 because of updated advice from the Joint Committee for Vaccines and Immunisation (JCVI).

Newborn babies are likely to have little or no natural protection against whooping cough until they have been fully vaccinated themselves. Vaccination of pregnant mothers helps protect children from birth until they are old enough to be vaccinated themselves. Vaccination of babies is routinely given at two, three and four months of age, with a booster administered three years later.

The vaccine given to pregnant women through this programme, called Boosterix-IPV®, also provides protection against diphtheria, tetanus and polio, in addition to whooping cough. There is no evidence that the use of this vaccine during pregnancy is unsafe for either the pregnant woman or her unborn baby. The vaccine is not live and cannot cause whooping cough. There may be some mild side effects from this vaccination, such as swelling, redness or tenderness, although serious side effects are extremely rare.

- [Whooping Cough \(Pertussis\) immunisation for pregnant women - Factsheet | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Whooping cough vaccination for pregnant women | nidirect](#)

Guidance for professionals

- [Whooping Cough \(Pertussis\) factsheet for primary care practitioners | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Whooping Cough \(Pertussis\) immunisation - Leaflet | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Whooping Cough \(Pertussis\) immunisation - Poster | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [PHA immunisation training materials for healthcare professional](#)
- Factsheet for professionals - [Whooping Cough \(Pertussis\) immunisation for pregnant women - Factsheet](#)
- Professional training PowerPoint - [Pertussis in pregnancy final draft RS and LF - 20240621.pptx](#)
- Professionals webinar [LearnHSCNI | Pertussis Webinar \(CEC\)](#)
- Service user leaflet - [Whooping Cough \(Pertussis\) immunisation - Leaflet](#)

Data and surveillance

- [Pertussis \(whooping cough\) update | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Pertussis: guidance, data and analysis - GOV.UK](#)

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