

Parent's Factsheet – Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

Current rise in whooping cough

- Whooping cough, clinically known as pertussis is a highly infectious disease that can spread rapidly from one person to another through contact with droplets remaining in the air after coughing.
- Whooping cough cases have been rising across England, as well as in many other countries, since December 2023 due to many different reasons.
- Numbers of whooping cough infections increase and decrease every 3 to 5 years. The last increase was in 2016, so **we are expecting a rise in infections this year.**
- However, in common with other diseases, cases fell to very low numbers during the pandemic due to restrictions e.g. social distancing, wearing facemasks
- The impact of the pandemic also means there is reduced immunity in the population.

What are the symptoms of whooping cough?

- Whooping cough (pertussis) is a bacterial infection which affects the lungs.
- The first signs of infection are like a cold, such as a runny nose and sore throat, but after about a week, the infection can develop into coughing that last for a few minutes and typically worse at night.
- Young babies may also make a distinctive 'whoop' or have difficulty breathing after coughing, though not all babies make this noise which means whooping cough can be hard to recognise.

How can I protect myself and my family?

- Vaccination remains the best defence against whooping cough and it is **very important** that pregnant women and young infants receive their vaccines at the right time.
- Whooping cough is **particularly dangerous for young babies**
- In older children, whooping cough can result in a long illness and time out of school.



- If you are pregnant and have not been vaccinated yet, or your child is not up-to-date with whooping cough or other routine vaccinations, **please contact your GP as soon as possible.**
- If you or your child have symptoms of whooping cough, ask for an **urgent GP appointment or get help from NHS 111**

What should I do if someone in my family has whooping cough?

- If anyone in your family is diagnosed with whooping cough, it's important they stay at home and do not go into work, school or nursery until **48 hours after starting antibiotics, or 3 weeks after symptoms start if they have not had antibiotics.**
- This helps to prevent the spread of infection, especially to vulnerable groups, including infants.

However, vaccination remains the best protection for babies and children. Please contact your GP as soon as possible to organise a catch-up vaccine if this has been missed.

More information: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/whooping-cough/>