

# Whooping Cough Briefing points May 24

Whooping cough, also known as pertussis, is a highly contagious bacterial infection that mainly affects the lungs and airways

- The first symptoms of whooping cough are like a common cold, with a runny nose and a mild fever. After about a week or two, the characteristic cough develops with uncontrolled bouts of intense coughing that can last for several minutes, sometimes causing vomiting.
- Whooping cough can affect people of all ages and while it can be a very unpleasant illness for older vaccinated adolescents and adults, young babies (under 3 months) who are too young to be fully protected through vaccination are at increased risk of serious complications or, rarely, death.
- The best defence is to make sure they are fully vaccinated.
- The whooping cough vaccine is given as part of the routine childhood vaccination schedule in the UK. Babies receive three doses at 8, 12 and 16 weeks old (the 6-in-1 vaccine), followed by a booster at 3 years 4 months. This provides high levels of protection against severe disease.
- It's also important for pregnant women to get vaccinated against whooping cough, ideally between 20 to 32 weeks of pregnancy. Vaccinating pregnant women allows the protection to pass to their unborn baby in the womb so that babies are protected from birth in their first months of life, before they can receive their own vaccines from 8 weeks of age
- Vaccination is crucial, as whooping cough can spread very easily through coughing and sneezing. If your child does catch it, they'll need to stay off school or nursery for 48 hours after starting antibiotics, or 3 weeks from the start of their symptoms if they haven't had the treatment.
- Whooping cough is a cyclical disease that regularly peaks every 3 to 5 years. We are, unfortunately, seeing increasing rates of whooping cough at present, following a prolonged period of very low case numbers due to restrictions, and reduced social mixing patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic
- The latest figures from UK Health Security Agency (week up to 5th May) – there have been 13 suspected or confirmed cases in Ealing reported to the UKHSA (pertussis is a notifiable disease).

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