

# Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

## Parent /Caregiver Information

Children's Health Service, Wellington and Kenepuru Hospitals

### What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough (also called Pertussis) is a lung infection caused by bacteria. It is known as whooping cough as children often make a "whoop" sound during coughing fits (episodes).

Whooping cough causes long coughing fits that are so strong children find it hard to breathe. The severity of the coughing can also cause your child to vomit.

Whooping cough is spread through coughing or sneezing and contact with saliva of someone with the illness.

Whooping cough can be prevented through vaccination. Previous infection does not provide life-long protection like vaccination does. Please talk to your child's nurse about vaccinating your family.

Whooping cough can affect all age groups, including adults. However, the illness is worse for babies and children and they may need hospital care.

### What are the symptoms of whooping cough?

- At the start of the infection your child may appear to have a cold, with a snotty nose, cough, chills (fever) and sore eyes
- As the illness continues your child may start to develop coughing which is much worse at night
- Your child's cough may start to sound like a "whoop" noise
- Your child may vomit because of the effort of coughing
- Your child may turn blue during a coughing spell as they struggle to breathe
- Your child may be unable to sleep because of the coughing, leaving them extremely tired (exhausted)

The symptoms of whooping cough can last 2 to 3 months.

### What is the treatment for whooping cough?

- Antibiotics can help to stop the bacteria growing in your child's lungs
- Antibiotics do not stop the cough, this only gets better over time
- Some babies and children are able to stay at home with whooping cough. But very young babies may need to be in hospital to help them breathe

### If your child is in hospital with whooping cough

- The coughing fits can be very frightening for parents. There is no treatment to stop the cough, instead staff will help you to keep your child as comfortable and safe as possible
- Warm oxygen can be used to help your child breathe
- Nurses may use a suction machine to help your child to get rid of any mucus they cough up
- Sometimes your child's energy may be used up with coughing and they will not be able to feed. If this happens the nurses will put a (nasogastric) tube in your child's nose to their tummy to give them food

Your child will stay in hospital until they are able to feed themselves and they do not need oxygen or help to clear the mucus produced by the coughing. This can take up to two weeks.

The Public Health Nurses may contact you while your child is in hospital. This is to make sure everyone in your family is safe and does not get whooping cough as well.

### If your child is at home with whooping cough

These steps will help your child to cope with the coughing fits. **If your child becomes more unwell, or turns blue call an ambulance 111**

- Do not smoke near your child or in any

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room they may enter. If you would like help to quit smoking please speak to your nurse or GP

- Encourage your child to rest as running or playing can bring on a coughing fit
- When your child is coughing lean them forward over your lap to help clear any mucus they may cough up
- Give small meals frequently, to reduce the risk of vomiting while coughing
- Encourage your child to drink small amounts of fluid often, water or milk is best

### **Who to contact**

If you have any concerns or questions about your child's health following surgery please contact your GP or After Hours Medical Centre.

### **After hours medical centres**

#### **Kenepuru Hospital Accident & Medical**

Open 24hrs a day everyday (04) 918 2300

#### **Paraparaumu -Team Medical Coastlands Shoppingtown**

Open 8am -10pm everyday (04) 298 2228

### **Waikanae Medical Centre**

Mon-Thurs 7pm-8am, Fri 5pm-8am, and at anytime during weekends or Public Holidays  
(04) 293 6002

### **Accident & Urgent Medical Centre Wellington**

Open 8am-11pm every day (04) 384 4944

### **Healthline**

If you are unsure if your child needs to visit your GP or Afterhours Medical Centre you may wish to call Healthline for free advice. Call free anytime on 0800 611 116

**Remember**  
**In an emergency call 111**