

## Why do adults need a booster to protect against whooping cough?

As immunity from immunisation and disease reduces over time, all adults can be at risk of the disease. A booster dose is particularly recommended for carers of young children (including fathers, and grandparents) adults working with young children, Healthcare Workers and any other adult wishing to protect themselves.

The booster doses are not free for adults.

## Are whooping cough vaccines safe?

Like all medications, vaccines may have side effects. Most side effects are minor, last a short time and do not require special treatment.

Studies have shown that the vaccine will not harm the mother or the unborn baby when given in pregnancy.

Before you have the vaccine, your doctor or immunisation provider will tell you what side effects to expect and what to do if you are worried.

## Where can I get the vaccine?

Children, adolescents and pregnant women:

- > The whooping cough vaccine is **free** for all children, adolescents and pregnant women in the third trimester. Speak to your doctor or immunisation provider about getting the free vaccine.

Other people can access the vaccine at a cost:

- > Your doctor can give you a prescription for the vaccine. The cost of the vaccine will vary between pharmacies.
- > Some local councils have the vaccine available for purchase at immunisation clinics. Contact your local council for more information.

## References

The online Australian Immunisation Handbook 10th Edition, (updated March 2017).

Website: [www.immunise.health.gov.au](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au)

# Whooping cough (pertussis)

## Who should be vaccinated?



## For more information

Immunisation Section SA Health  
PO Box 6 Rundle Mall  
Adelaide SA 5000  
Telephone: 1300 232 272  
[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/immunisation)

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## What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough (also known as pertussis) is a highly contagious infection of the respiratory tract.

Serious complications from whooping cough include pneumonia, seizures or brain damage.

About 1 in 125 babies less than six months of age with whooping cough die from pneumonia or brain damage.

In Australia, large outbreaks of whooping cough occur every three to four years.

## Who is at risk?

Anyone can get whooping cough but it is very serious in children under two years of age where they are often hospitalised.

Most hospitalisations and deaths occur in babies under six months of age as they are not yet fully protected from immunisation.

**Immunisation is the best way to protect against whooping cough.**

## What are the symptoms?

Whooping cough starts with cold-like symptoms – a runny nose, sore watery eyes, a mild fever and feeling generally unwell.

After three to seven days a dry, irritating cough develops. In babies, coughing episodes are followed by a deep breath in that can sound like a 'whoop'. The 'whoop' is more obvious in young children. Babies can go blue and stop breathing during the coughing episodes. Some people vomit after coughing.

Adults and older children suffer bouts of coughing that can last for several months and can lead to complications such as rib fractures and pneumonia.

## How is it spread?

Whooping cough is spread by coughing, sneezing or direct contact with infected nose or mouth secretions.

It is most infectious when the cold-like symptoms first appear and for the first three weeks of coughing. If left untreated, a person with whooping cough can spread the disease to other people during this time. Early treatment reduces the spread of the disease.

Evidence shows that most babies with whooping cough will have caught it from family members.

When a person has whooping cough, 90% of any unprotected household contacts are also likely to become infected.



## If I have already had whooping cough, can I get it again?

Yes. Natural infection does not provide long term protection and repeat infection can occur.

## What is the best way to protect against whooping cough?

Immunisation is the best way to protect against whooping cough.

Free pertussis containing combination vaccines are available to protect against whooping cough for children, adolescents and pregnant women.

The first dose at six weeks of age provides some protection but the best level of protection is not achieved until after the third dose, so babies less than six months of age remain at risk of severe disease.

Recommended ages for whooping cough immunisation in childhood and adolescence available through the National Immunisation Program are shown below.

Dose number	Age
1	6 weeks
2	4 months
3	6 months
4 (Booster 1)	18 months
5 (Booster 2)	4 years
6 (Booster 3)	Year 8 – high school

**It is important to have all doses on time.**

**The whooping cough vaccine is free for pregnant women through a state funded program**

Women, who receive the whooping cough vaccine in the third trimester of pregnancy, pass protection onto the baby in the first six weeks of life before they can have their first dose of vaccine.

Further information is available in the *Immunisations during pregnancy brochure*.