

**New mothers need a whooping cough booster, to reduce the risk of passing it on to their newborn.**

### Did you know?

42% of babies with whooping cough caught it from their mother\*7

- Whooping cough is on the rise in Australia with 11,000 reported cases in 2006.<sup>6</sup>
- 90% of cases are now in adults<sup>8</sup> who don't have the distinct 'whoop' cough<sup>2</sup> ...so most don't even know they have it.
- Whooping cough can have serious consequences in babies who are too young to be fully protected by their primary immunisations – i.e. less than 6 months old.

**Ask your GP about getting a booster vaccination (before pregnancy or shortly after the birth) to reduce the risk of passing on whooping cough to your newborn.**

For more information visit [www.whoopingcough.com.au](http://www.whoopingcough.com.au)

References: 1. American Academy of Family Physicians. Whooping Cough (Pertussis). Accessed 22 October 2007 at: [http://www.kidshelth.org/parent/infections/lung/whooping\\_cough.html](http://www.kidshelth.org/parent/infections/lung/whooping_cough.html). 2. Edwards KM and Decker MD. Pertussis vaccine. Chapter 21. In: Plotkin SA, Orenstein WA, eds. Vaccines. 4th ed. Philadelphia, Pa: WB Saunders Co; 2003:471-527. 3. Tobar's Online Textbook of Bacteriology 2004. *Bordetella pertussis* and whooping cough. Accessed 22 October 2007 at: <http://textbookofbacteriology.net/pertussis.html>. 4. NHMRC. The Australian Immunisation Handbook, 2003: 8th Edition: 173-183. 5. Guimaraes-Ocampo H, et al. Pertussis. Accessed 22 October 2007 at: <http://www.ama-assn.org/speical/pertussis.htm>. 6. Communicable Disease Network Australia. National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System. Number of notifications of pertussis in Australia 1991-2006. Accessed 22 October 2007 at: <http://www9.health.gov.au/local/ncdr/pertussis.htm>. 7. Pichichero ME, et al. Expert Rev Vaccines 2006; 5(2):175-187.

\*In a study of 68 infants in Australia <12 months of age (2004) where the source had been identified. The NHMRC are a government body who promote the development and maintenance of public and individual health of the Australian population.

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## 10 Common Questions & Answers about Whooping Cough

### Q1. What is whooping cough and how is it spread?

Whooping cough (or pertussis) is a highly contagious disease that is caused by bacteria that are found in the nose and throat of an infected person.<sup>1</sup> It is spread from one person to another through close contact – e.g. when an infected person talks, sneezes, or coughs.<sup>2</sup>

### Q2. What are the symptoms of whooping cough?

The symptoms are different in adults and babies.

#### BABIES

Whooping cough in babies begins with flu-like symptoms, such as a runny nose, sneezing, mild fever, and a mild cough which lasts 1 to 2 weeks.<sup>1</sup>

They then develop a thick, sticky mucus in the windpipe, which makes it very hard for them to eat, drink and breathe.

A baby's lips and nails may turn blue due to lack of oxygen. They may also experience vomiting and gagging episodes after the coughing spells; this can often leave them completely exhausted.<sup>2</sup>

**The 'whoop' is the loud gasp babies make as they struggle to breathe in through narrowed airway passages between the coughing spasms.<sup>2</sup>**

#### ADULTS

Adults often don't have the usual 'whoop' cough, so many cases are often mistaken for a bad chest cold or bronchitis.<sup>1</sup> Although cases in adults are considered mild, they are still highly contagious and can easily be unknowingly passed on to others.<sup>2</sup>

### Q3. How serious is whooping cough?

Babies less than 6 months old who are not immunised or who are not fully immunised, are at highest risk of getting severe whooping cough.<sup>3</sup> This can lead to potentially life-threatening complications including pneumonia, brain damage and even death.<sup>4</sup> Over 83% of those who are hospitalised with whooping cough are less than 1 year old.<sup>5</sup>

### Q4. How common is whooping cough?

Whooping cough cases are on the rise, with epidemics occurring every 3-4 years.<sup>4</sup> From 2002-2006, there were approximately 41,000 cases of whooping cough in Australia.<sup>6</sup> Although many of us think whooping cough is a childhood illness, 90% of cases are now in adults over 20 years of age.<sup>8</sup>

### Q5. How can I prevent whooping cough as an adult?

The only way to prevent whooping cough is through a booster vaccination.

### Q6. How does the vaccine work?

The vaccine works by causing the body to produce its own protection against whooping cough. It does this by making antibodies in the blood, which fight the bacteria that cause the disease. If a vaccinated person comes into contact with the bacteria, the body is usually ready to destroy them. The vaccine will not give you or your child whooping cough.

### Q7. Do babies have antibodies from their mother?

Babies are born with maternal antibodies however this does not give adequate protection against whooping cough.<sup>4</sup> Antibodies transferred to the baby through breast milk will not provide adequate protection either. As a result, babies can be infected before they are old enough to be fully vaccinated.

### Q8. Am I still protected if I had my whooping cough vaccinations as a child (or teenager)?

Whether you have been vaccinated for whooping cough before or you've had the disease, your immunity does not last forever so you should get a booster.<sup>4</sup>

#### The current whooping cough Vaccination Schedule<sup>4</sup>

Primary schedule	2, 4 and 6 months
Booster:	4 years
Booster:	15-17 years
...then immunity drops over time	

### Q9. Which adults should have a whooping cough booster?

In order to prevent adult to child transmission of whooping cough, The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)<sup>4</sup> recommends the following groups have a whooping cough booster:<sup>4,5</sup>

- Women planning a pregnancy
- New parents (as soon as possible after the baby is born)
- Any adult who wishes to protect themselves against whooping cough – e.g. grandparents
- Adults working with young children – e.g. childcare workers and healthcare workers

<sup>4</sup> Those who have not had a previous adolescent or adult booster.

### Q10. What should I do if I have whooping cough?

If you suspect you may have whooping cough, please make an appointment to see your GP as soon as possible. As you may be contagious, antibiotics can be prescribed to help prevent the infection spreading.<sup>4</sup> There is however a short period of time in which these must be taken in order to be effective.<sup>4</sup>