



Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Frequently Asked Questions

(Primary School and Children's Services)

WHAT IS WHOOPING COUGH?

Whooping cough is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*. It is characterised by severe coughing fits that produce a "whooping" sound.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Whooping cough spreads through droplets from coughing or sneezing from an infected person. It can also spread by coming into contact with surfaces contaminated with these droplets.

WHY SHOULD I BE WORRIED?

Pertussis can affect people of all ages. However, young infants (especially those less than 6 months of age) are at increased risk of severe complications, including pneumonia, seizures, and even death. Being highly contagious, schools or groups of young children, who often cough & sneeze, can facilitate mass outbreaks – impacting children, and their direct and indirect contacts.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

Vaccination is the most effective prevention method.

Free pertussis-containing vaccination is available for eligible people through the [National Immunisation Program](#) schedule, which include:

- infants at 2 (can be given from 6 weeks of age), 4 and 6 months of age
- children at 18 months and 4 years of age
- adolescents in Year 7 (or age equivalent)
- pregnant women in every pregnancy between 20 to 32 weeks gestation
- people under 20 years who did not receive pertussis-containing vaccination in childhood, where the vaccine was not given during childhood as [catch-up vaccination](#)
- refugees and humanitarian entrants aged 20 and over.

An adult pertussis-containing vaccine is also recommended for the following people if their last dose was more than 10 years ago:

- adults working with or caring for children, especially healthcare and childcare workers in contact with infants.
- women who recently gave birth and did not receive a pertussis-containing vaccine during pregnancy
- parents, guardians, or carers of infants aged less than 6 months
- adults 65 years of age and older as a single booster
- travellers.

Practising good hygiene and appropriate isolation measures from infected individuals also helps reduce the risk.

For information regarding childhood vaccination, please refer to the state-wide [Maternal & Child Health Helpline - 13 22 29](#) (24 hours a day, 7 days a week).

To book a vaccination appointment, please refer to the [CIRV Vaccine Portal](#). For Latrobe City, please contact the Latrobe City Council’s Immunisation Team on 1300 367 700.

WHAT IF A CHILD IS UNWELL?

Pertussis begins with symptoms similar to those of a cold (e.g., cough, tiredness, blocked or runny nose, low-grade fevers which may last for one to two weeks), with the cough usually worsening to include:

- Severe bouts of coughing
- Characteristic ‘whooping’ sound on breathing
- Vomiting at the end of a bout of coughing

If your child becomes symptomatic, please visit your GP for testing and advice on antibiotic treatment.

For a listing of Priority Primary Care Clinics and telehealth services specifically for the Gippsland region, refer to the [Gippsland Primary Health Network - After-hours Services](#).

CAN A CHILD GO TO SCHOOL/CHILDCARE?

For symptomatic children:

- Any symptomatic children must isolate and seek medical attention.
- Children diagnosed with whooping cough must **not** attend school for:
 - a. 21 days after the onset of cough, or
 - b. Until they have completed 5 days of a course of appropriate antibiotic treatment.

This exclusion is required by law under the Public Health and Wellbeing legislation.

School exclusion requirements for close contacts not showing infectious symptoms:

	RECEIVED THREE DOSES OF PERTUSSIS VACCINE	NOT RECEIVED THREE DOSES OF PERTUSSIS VACCINE
AGE: Less than 7 years	Can continue to go to school/childcare	If in the same room with a child diagnosed with whooping cough, will need to be excluded from school/childcare for: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. 14 days after the last exposure to the infectious case b. Or until they have taken the first 5 days of a course of effective antibiotic treatment <p><i>This exclusion is required by law under the Public Health and Wellbeing legislation.</i></p>
AGE: 7 years and older	Can continue to go to school	Can continue to go to school

Reference: [School exclusion table for primary schools and children's services](#)

For more detailed information on pertussis, refer to the following resources:

- Better Health Channel - [Pertussis \(Whooping cough\)](#)
- Department of Health – [Pertussis](#)
- [Australian Immunisation Handbook – Whooping cough \(pertussis\) vaccine](#)

For a pertussis factsheet available in other languages, refer to:

- [Pertussis \(whooping cough\) Factsheet – Health Translations](#)