What is Whooping Cough?

Whooping cough is a highly infectious bacterial disease with ‘cold-like’ symptoms progressing to a cough. After several days, there may be severe coughing bouts during which the child may become breathless, red in the face and may sound as if they are choking and possibly vomit. Sometimes a ‘whoop’ may be heard as the child breathes in after coughing. Small babies do not usually whoop. Whooping cough may affect any age group but is usually more serious in children under two years of age.

How long does it last?

The cough may last for up to three months (it is also known as the 100 day cough). Vaccinated or partially vaccinated children may still develop whooping cough although the disease is usually milder.

How is it spread?

Whooping cough is highly infectious. It is spread by infected secretions from the nose being carried on hands or transferred to toys. Also spread by coughing. Children are infectious from the start of cold symptoms until three weeks after the onset of coughing in a patient who has not been treated by specific antibiotics.

How can it be treated?

Some children with whooping cough, especially young babies, may need to stay in hospital but many children can be cared for at home. Depending on the length of symptoms, your child may be started on a course of antibiotics. These will shorten the period that your child is infectious (5 days after starting antibiotics) and therefore decrease the spread of the disease but will not necessarily shorten the duration of the illness unless started very early. As whooping cough is highly infectious, your child should be kept at home away from other people as much as possible until they have had 5 days of antibiotics or for 3 weeks from the start of coughing. To help recovery, encourage rest and fluids and support your child through coughing bouts. Do not let anyone smoke around your child. Smoke free children recover faster and keep healthier.

Unvaccinated children who have been in contact with whooping cough should be kept at home for fourteen days. Please advise the parents of any contacts so that they can check their own child’s vaccination status.

Family contacts of children with Whooping Cough may need antibiotic treatment.

Whooping Cough is a notifiable disease and Crown Public Health may contact you about your child’s progress.
Seek Medical help if your child:

- Is getting worse
- Coughing episodes are getting worse
- Not feeding well
- Turns blue
- Stops breathing

Information on your child’s admission will be sent to your GP.

Have you changed your GP? If so, do we have your current GP recorded correctly?

If you do not have a regular GP, please talk to your nurse who can give you a list of GPs in your area.

If you have been discharged from the Children’s Acute Assessment Unit, one of the nurses will phone you the next day to check on your child’s progress and answer any questions you may have.

If you are concerned over the next 24 hours, please contact us on 364 0428.

Continue to contact your GP for ongoing care of your child.

Children’s health information website: www.kidshealth.org.nz

Christchurch Hospital website: www.cdhb.govt.nz