



Guidance for children and young people settings with cases of whooping cough (pertussis)

What whooping cough is

Whooping cough is caused by the 'pertussis' bacteria, and spreads between people quite easily. You can get whooping cough at any age, but it can make babies in particular very unwell.

There has been a rise in the number of cases of whooping cough seen in England recently. The people most at risk of whooping cough are babies younger than 12 months old who have not had all of their pertussis vaccinations. This guidance sets out what you can do to minimise the risk to people working in and attending your setting.

Symptoms of whooping cough

The first symptoms of whooping cough are similar to a cold, such as a runny nose, sore throat, and sometimes a high temperature. After 1 or 2 weeks, someone with whooping cough may:

- have fits of coughing, which can last for a few minutes, and get worse at night
- make a 'whoop' sound when gasping for breath between coughs
- have difficulty breathing between coughs, and babies may turn blue or grey
- become very red in the face while coughing

Whooping cough can make babies younger than 12 months old very seriously unwell. In the worst cases, it can cause death. Vaccination of mothers during pregnancy, and babies from 8 weeks old, is the best protection for babies against whooping cough.

Older children and adults are less likely to become seriously unwell from whooping cough, but the symptoms can be quite uncomfortable and may last for several weeks or months.

More information about whooping cough is available on the NHS website: [Whooping cough - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/whooping-cough/).

How whooping cough spreads

You can catch whooping cough through close contact with someone who has whooping cough when they are coughing or sneezing. Whooping cough spreads in places where people have prolonged close contact with one another such as in households.

It is particularly important to limit the spread of whooping cough in places where people with the infection may have contact with people who are more likely to become seriously ill (such as in nurseries and other childcare settings for babies).

Advise people with whooping cough to stay away

You should follow the advice set out in the following guidance: [UKHSA guidance on managing whooping cough in settings with children and young people](#).

If someone attending your setting has been told by a healthcare professional that they may have whooping cough, they should stay off school, work or nursery until 48 hours after starting antibiotics, or 14 days after the cough started if they have not had antibiotics. This is to help prevent the spread of whooping cough to other people.

Staff that provide close personal care to babies in a nursery or other childcare setting should stay off work for 21 days after the cough started if they have not had antibiotics.

Encourage people working and attending your setting to get vaccinated

The best way to prevent the spread of whooping cough is to make sure that everyone who is eligible is fully vaccinated against it. Encourage all eligible staff and people attending your setting to get their vaccinations when they are offered them:

- pregnant women will be offered a vaccination between 16 and 32 weeks of their pregnancy (usually around the time of the 20-week scan)
- babies will be offered 3 doses of a 6-in-1 vaccine which protects them against whooping cough - these vaccines are normally given when the baby is 8, 12 and 16 weeks old
- children will be offered a booster dose of a 4-in-1 vaccine which protects them against whooping cough when they are 3 years 4 months old
- if a child has missed any of their vaccinations against whooping cough, they can receive another vaccination until they are 10 years old, by contacting their GP

Cleaning

Whooping cough can spread via droplets coughed or sneezed out by someone with the infection. Regular cleaning will help to reduce the chance of infections spreading within your setting, especially frequently touched items such as light switches, hand rails and door handles.

Encourage people attending your setting to carry out good hand and respiratory hygiene:

- wash hands with soap and water
- use tissues when coughing or sneezing
- throw used tissues in the bin

If there has been a case of whooping cough within your setting, you do not need to carry out any special cleaning, but keep routinely cleaning using your normal products.

Informing parents, carers, and visitors

If you wish to send a letter to parents, carers, and visitors to your setting, you can use the template letter at the end of this document. This explains what whooping cough is, how to stop it spreading (including when to not go to school, work or nursery), and when children and people who are pregnant should get vaccinated.

When to contact your health protection team

You do not normally need to contact your local health protection team if you have a case of whooping cough in your setting, unless:

- there is a death or serious illness from whooping cough in your setting
- you have issues that stop you from applying the steps above (cleaning, advising people with whooping cough to stay away, and encouraging vaccination)
- there are babies attending your setting who have had contact with the case of whooping cough, who are aged under 12 months and who have not been fully vaccinated against whooping cough

Template letter for parents, carers, and visitors

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s),

There has been a rise in the number of cases of whooping cough seen in England recently. This letter describes what whooping cough is, how it spreads, and when you should get vaccinated to prevent whooping cough.

What whooping cough is

Whooping cough is caused by the 'pertussis' bacteria (bug) and can spread between people quite easily. You can get whooping cough at any age, but it can make babies in particular very unwell. Whooping cough can be treated with antibiotics. More information about whooping cough is available on the NHS website: [Whooping cough - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk).

How whooping cough spreads

You can catch whooping cough through close contact with someone who has whooping cough when they are coughing or sneezing.

If you are diagnosed with whooping cough, you or your child should stay off school, work or nursery until 48 hours after starting antibiotics, or 2 weeks after your cough started if you've not had antibiotics.

If you're a healthcare or nursery worker and work with young babies or pregnant women, stay off work for 3 weeks after your cough started if you've not had antibiotics.

Preventing whooping cough

The best way to prevent whooping cough is through vaccination. You should get vaccinated against whooping cough if you are pregnant; this will protect your baby when they are born. You should speak to your midwife or other healthcare provider for more information.

Babies and children in the UK are vaccinated against whooping cough during their [childhood vaccination schedule](#). If you think your child has missed any of their vaccinations against whooping cough, they can receive catch up vaccinations for protection against whooping cough until they are 10 years old. Contact your child's GP to arrange an appointment.