

## Whooping cough / Pertussis

Whooping cough is a respiratory disease, caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*, which is found in the mouth, nose and throat. Children with Whooping cough can have coughing spells that last 4 to 8 weeks. The disease is most dangerous for infants and small children.

In Slovenia, vaccination against whooping cough started in 1959. This has greatly reduced the incidence of this disease, however, in recent years, epidemics of whooping cough among schoolchildren have reappeared because immunity after vaccination or after recovery from the disease is not long-lasting.

### The transmission

Whooping cough is transmitted from person to person by infectious droplets from coughing, sneezing and also indirectly through infected objects.

### Symptoms and signs of the disease

The first symptoms are similar to those of the common cold – they include runny nose and eyes, mild fever, and occasionally a mild cough.

The cough then gradually intensifies and characteristic coughing fits occur, followed by a sudden deep inhalation accompanied by a characteristic whooping sound. The patient may turn blue because they are not getting enough oxygen due to coughing. These fits, which are most common at night, may be followed by vomiting and tiredness.

Whooping cough is still a significant cause of death in infants under 6 months of age. The most common complication is bacterial pneumonia, which also has the highest mortality rate. Other complications include febrile convulsions, respiratory failure, loss of appetite, otitis media, dehydration and neurological sequelae (brain haemorrhage) due to reduced oxygen supply to the brain.

### Treatment

Whooping cough is treated with an antibiotic that reduces the intensity of the disease while reducing the chance of transmitting the bacteria to others. Adequate fluid intake is also important to prevent dehydration.

### Prevention

The most effective way to prevent whooping cough is to maintain a high vaccination coverage in the community. Whooping cough vaccination is included in the compulsory vaccination programme in Slovenia.

Additional information:

- [Notification to close at-risk and indirect at-risk contacts \(for children\)](#)
- [Notification to close at-risk and indirect at-risk contacts \(for adults\)](#)
- [Notification to a person who has been in contact with a person with whooping cough and who has also developed the disease](#)