



Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s),

We have been informed that there are several children who recently attended your child's school who may have Pertussis (whooping cough).

Symptoms

Whooping cough is caused by infection with pertussis bacteria. For most school-age patients, symptoms will resolve over several weeks, while for some, coughing can persist for a few months.

The symptoms of pertussis include:

- a cough lasting several weeks following initial cold-like symptoms
- prolonged bouts of coughing ('paroxysms')
- post-coughing retching or vomiting
- a 'whoop' sound on breathing in
- rib pain

Find more information about pertussis on the NHS website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/whooping-cough/>

Advice for parents or guardians

If your child has any of the symptoms described above, we advise you seek medical advice from a GP and take this letter. Your GP may arrange treatment and/or testing for whooping cough. Your GP can prescribe antibiotics without waiting for test results.

Pertussis is infectious for 21 days after onset of symptoms, but with antibiotic treatment this reduces to 48 hours. Antibiotics are not recommended or thought to be beneficial if it is more than 21 days since onset of symptoms.

Whooping cough is spread through respiratory droplets: coughing into tissues and washing hands with soap and water can reduce spread.

Exclusion advice

Individuals with suspected whooping cough **should stay off school** until they have had at least 48 hours of appropriate antibiotics or 21 days from the onset of the symptoms if no antibiotics have been taken and they feel well enough to return.

Immunisation

If your child missed any infant or pre-school vaccines, we recommend that you arrange catch-up vaccination through your GP practice as soon as possible. If your child is up to date with their pertussis vaccination, we do not advise any further boosters.

The whooping cough vaccine is included in the [national immunisation schedule](#).

It is still possible for fully vaccinated children to develop whooping cough (although the illness is generally milder) so if your child develops symptoms they should be taken to the GP for advice.

Further information for individuals diagnosed with whooping cough can be found at [Information for individuals diagnosed with whooping cough - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

At-risk groups

Whooping cough is of most concern in **unimmunised infants** when it can be life threatening. Vaccinations to prevent whooping cough are routinely given to infants, pre-school children, and pregnant women.

All pregnant women are recommended to get their routine pertussis vaccination ideally between weeks 20 and 32 of pregnancy (but can be given from 16 weeks and up until labour if needed) to protect their baby.

If you have pertussis symptoms, you should be especially careful to avoid spending time with at-risk groups while infectious.

Yours faithfully

Health Protection Team
UK Health Security Agency South West