

CHILDREN  
WITH

# whooping cough



# Children with whooping cough

## General information:

Whooping cough is caused by an infection with a contagious bacterium. It takes 3-14 days from the child has been infected until the symptoms appear. Infants with whooping cough often get very ill.

Babies are vaccinated against whooping cough when they are 3, 5 and 12 months old and 5 years old. The vaccination does not give 100% protection, so the child may still catch whooping cough several times, but the course of the condition will be milder.

Whooping cough has two stages:

- A common cold stage, which lasts 1-2 weeks
- A coughing stage, which lasts 2-8 weeks.

## How is it contracted?

Whooping cough bacteria are found in the infected child's spittle and mucus. Infection takes place by breathing in small droplets, e.g. from coughing and sneezing, and from having been in contact with hands, toys, etc.

which are contaminated with mucus or spit.

The infection primarily spreads during the common cold stage, but the child may infect others for up to 8-9 weeks after the disease has started.

## Symptoms:

### In the common cold stage:

- Common cold symptoms
- Sometimes accompanied by fever and coughing.

### In the coughing stage:

- The coughing gets worse, and the child typically has coughing spells where the facial colour may turn red, blue or pale
- The coughing spells may vary from a few to 40-50 a day, and may last from a few seconds to several minutes – often ending with the child coughing up thick mucus
- Infants may briefly stop breathing
- The child may "whoop" (gasp for air after several coughing spells)
- The child will often vomit in connection with a coughing spell
- The child is often in pain when coughing.

## Good advice:

- Offer the child plenty to drink. Liquids make the mucus thinner and easier to cough up
- Do not dress the child in warm clothes if it runs a fever
- Elevate the child's headboard as this will make it easier to breathe. Changing position, sleeping on both sides, sitting up in bed, moving/

playing as best it can will loosen the mucus and make it easier for the child to cough

- Fresh air. Air out several times a day
- Saline drops for the nose may loosen thick snot/mucus. You may use a “nose suction device”, which can be bought at the pharmacy
- Do not smoke. It irritates the child’s airways
- Tell the parents of other babies that you have been in contact with, that your child has whooping cough.

### When to see a doctor?

Contact a doctor if the child:

- has long coughing spells with violent whooping (gasping for air)
- turns blue or pale in the face after coughing, or stops breathing
- has vomited a lot and cannot drink
- seems more tired and weak than usual
- makes you worry and feel insecure.

Contact your general practitioner first because he/she knows your child better than the doctor on call. You can also get good advice and guidance from your health visitor.

### Treatment:

- If the symptoms are discovered in time, the child can be treated with antibiotics. This may relieve the course of the condition and reduce the risk of infecting others
- Give the child painkillers as agreed with a doctor
- Relieve the symptoms.

### Prevention:

- Find out whether other children in the area or your local mothers’ group have whooping cough
- Be aware of the fact that your child is particularly at risk of infection during its first 3 months
- Vaccination provides a good protection, but since the first vaccination is not very effective, infants, especially under 6 months, should not be exposed to infection
- Good hygiene. Always wash your hands after touching the child
- If your child has whooping cough, avoid contact with other children aged 0 to 6 months due to the risk of infection.

### Childcare:

The child can return to childcare once the fever has gone and if the coughing spells no longer cause problems. Even though the child may infect others for several weeks after the coughing has started, the rule is that the child can return to childcare anyway. This is because the other children are assumed to have had at least two vaccinations. Contact with infants (0-6 months) should still be avoided.

Inform the childcare centre that your child has been infected with whooping cough.

## Parental guidelines

These guidelines have been prepared by a working group set up by the departments of paediatrics in Herning, Randers, Skejby and Viborg.

The intention with these guidelines is to provide parents with advice across the following sectors: health visitors, general practitioners, doctors on call, and the staff at paediatric admission wards in the Central Denmark Region.

The parental guidelines can be seen and downloaded from the internet on the web site [www.fv.rm.dk](http://www.fv.rm.dk)

You may order additional copies from Rikke Dalsgaard, Koncern Kvalitet, Central Denmark Region, Skottenborg 26, 8800 Viborg. [rikke.dalsgaard@stab.rm.dk](mailto:rikke.dalsgaard@stab.rm.dk)

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