



Pertussis Vaccination

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, or “whooping cough”, is a highly infectious bacterial infection of the lungs with *Bordetella pertussis* bacteria. Over 3% of babies less than 6 months of age who are hospitalised with pertussis die from pneumonia or encephalopathy (brain damage). Older children and adults usually develop a persistent, dry cough for several weeks. Pertussis epidemics occur about every 4 years in Australia, affecting mostly adolescents and adults.

How common is pertussis?

Since 1990, about 300 cases of pertussis have been notified to the Department of Health each year. Since 1995, when a booster dose of pertussis vaccine was introduced at 5 years of age, about 15% of cases occurred in children less than 2 years of age, 10% 2-4 years, 25% 5-9 years, 15% 10-14 years, 5% 15-19 years, 2% 20-24 years, 3% 25-30 years, and 25% more than 30 years of age. About 60% of cases occurred from September to January and about 60% of cases occurred in the metropolitan area.

Why should children and adolescents or adults be vaccinated against pertussis?

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that all Australian children should routinely be vaccinated against pertussis at 2, 4, and 6 months, and at 4 years of age. This provides good protection against pertussis until about 11 years of age, after which adolescents and adults are susceptible to multiple pertussis infections throughout their life. From 2004, a booster dose of "adult" pertussis vaccine (dT_P_a, Boostrix™) is recommended for adolescents (children in Year 7 primary school in WA) to prolong their immunity to pertussis and to help control pertussis epidemics. A booster dose of pertussis vaccine is also recommended for parents of babies and for adults working with babies (to prevent them catching pertussis and infecting the babies).

Where can children or adults get vaccinated against pertussis?

At their GP, local immunisation clinic or primary school (Year 7 students only). Child pertussis vaccine (DTP_a, Infanrix™) is free, but it contains more diphtheria antigen than adult pertussis vaccine (dT_P_a, Boostrix™), and should not be given to people older than 7 years of age. Adult pertussis vaccine is free for children in Year 7 primary school from 2004, but it is not free for other adolescents or adults and must be prescribed by a doctor for these people.

Who should not be vaccinated against pertussis?

People who have had a severe allergic reaction to any of the vaccine components (e.g. diphtheria toxoid, tetanus toxoid, phenoxyethanol) or to a previous dose of that vaccine or who developed unexplained encephalopathy (acute brain disorder) within 7 days of vaccination or who are pregnant.

What are the side effects from pertussis vaccination?

Serious side effects following pertussis vaccination are rare. Common, temporary side effects include inflammation at the injection site (20%) and fever (5%).

What is the treatment for the side effects from vaccinations?

Paracetamol is recommended to reduce fever and pain (**DO NOT OVERDOSE**). Extra fluids (e.g. breast milk or water) and cooling (e.g. by fan, tepid sponging or bathing) are recommended to reduce fever. If any reaction is severe or if you are worried about any symptoms, immediately contact your doctor, community nurse, or local hospital.

Where can I get more information about pertussis vaccination?

Ask your GP, local Public Health Unit, community nurse, health worker, the Central Immunisation Clinic (telephone 9321 1312), or use the Internet, e.g. www.immunise.health.gov.au/handbook.htm, www.cdc.gov/nip, www.immunisation.nhs.uk.