

Pertussis (whooping cough) public health key messages

October 2024

Increased risk of Pertussis

Aotearoa New Zealand is at high risk of a pertussis (whooping cough) outbreak due to increased numbers of cases across the motu.

Pertussis causes breathing difficulties and severe coughing fits. It can be spread easily between people, usually by coughing and sneezing. It is particularly serious for pēpi, tamariki and older adults, and in some cases, can also be fatal.

Vaccination provides the best protection

The best protection for you and your whānau against Pertussis is to get vaccinated – particularly pregnant people, pēpi, tamariki and older adults who are at higher risk. Pertussis is highly contagious and can cause serious harm to babies, especially those who are too young to be vaccinated.

Getting vaccinated for whooping cough while you are pregnant protects your baby from serious complications of this disease. The whooping cough pregnancy vaccine is FREE, and is available from 13 weeks, but is best given from 16 weeks of pregnancy. The vaccine should also be given with each pregnancy to protect each baby.

Pertussis vaccinations are free for children under 18. This includes visitors to Aotearoa New Zealand, and it does not matter what their visa or citizenship status is.

Childhood vaccinations to protect against whooping cough are needed at ages 6 weeks, 3 months and 5 months, and again at 4 years. A further booster is given at age 11 years (school year 7), and it is important that children are kept up to date with all of their vaccinations to provide the best protection. But even if tamariki have missed their vaccinations, it's not too late to catch up.

New Zealand has a combined pertussis and tetanus vaccine. Adults are eligible for one free booster from age 45 (if they have not had four previous tetanus doses) and can get one free from age 65.

For more information, or help to book your vaccination, call the Vaccination Healthline free on 0800 28 29 26 (8.30am-5.00pm Monday to Friday) or visit info.health.nz/bookavaccine

Signs and symptoms

Whooping cough causes breathing difficulties and severe coughing fits. The cough can go on for weeks or months which is why it is sometimes called the '100-day cough'.