

How whooping cough affects children

Whooping cough in babies and children

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Whooping cough (also called pertussis) is a highly contagious infection of the lungs and airways. It is caused by a bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*.

It can make babies and young children very ill. Older children and adults can get it too.

A child with whooping cough will have repeated spells of coughing that can last for 2 months or longer.

Babies under 6 months old

Whooping cough is most serious for babies under 6 months old.

They have a greater chance of:

- [dehydration](#) - not enough fluids in their body
- pneumonia - a severe lung infection
- breathing difficulties
- weight loss
- fits (seizures)
- kidney problems
- brain damage caused by a lack of oxygen reaching the brain
- death - but this is rare

Take your baby to the GP or hospital if:

- you think they have whooping cough

- they're under 1 year old

Phone ahead to let them know that you think your baby has whooping cough. This is because they may need to make arrangements to prevent the infection from spreading to other patients.

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