

## Dana's story

Baby Dana was born a happy, healthy girl. She was breastfeeding well and putting on weight.

At 11 days old, she developed a blocked nose and was unsettled at night. Dana's parents acted quickly and saw the GP. When she was three weeks old, Dana developed an occasional cough and appeared to gag, and her parents returned to the GP. As soon as Dana tested positive for whooping cough, she went straight to hospital.

Soon after arriving, Dana had her first coughing bout where she turned blue and needed oxygen. On the third day at hospital, Dana developed pneumonia and she was placed on a ventilator. She was transferred to intensive care.

On the fifth day, the whooping cough toxins caused her organs to shut down and Dana had a cardiac arrest. She was only 32 days old when she died.

Nobody knows where Dana was infected with whooping cough. It may have been at her sibling's school or preschool. A loving relative or friend, or a complete stranger may have unknowingly passed the infection on.

Whooping cough affects people of all ages, but the real danger of the devastating disease is on young babies like Dana.

That's why it's up to everyone to

**IDENTIFY • PROTECT • PREVENT**



## Where do I go for further information?

### Australian Capital Territory

ACT Immunisation Inquiry Line  
(02) 6205 2300

### New South Wales

Contact the local Public Health Units (look under "Health" in the *White Pages*)

### Northern Territory

(08) 8922 8044

### Queensland

Contact the local Public Health Units (look under "Health" in the *White Pages*) or 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) 24 hour health hotline

### South Australia

South Australia Immunisation Section  
1300 232 272

SA (24-hour) Parent Help-line (Child and Youth Health)  
1300 364 100

### Tasmania

1800 671 738

### Victoria

1300 882 008

### Western Australia

(08) 9321 1312

## Websites

National Centre for Immunisation Research & Surveillance  
[www.ncirs.edu.au](http://www.ncirs.edu.au)

Immunise Australia Program  
(Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing)  
[www.immunise.health.gov.au](http://www.immunise.health.gov.au)

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Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

# Whooping Cough



**1 IDENTIFY**  
*the disease*



**2 PROTECT**  
*your child*



**3 PREVENT**  
*the spread*

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**i M M U N I S E**  
AUSTRALIA PROGRAM

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## IDENTIFY

### What is whooping cough?

- Whooping cough (or pertussis) is a serious respiratory infection that causes a long coughing illness. In babies, it can lead to pneumonia and brain damage.
- Whooping cough can be life-threatening for babies. Newborns are not immune and they often get extremely sick.
- Older children and adults can get whooping cough and can spread it to others, including babies.
- Antibiotics can prevent whooping cough spreading if given early but the cough often continues after treatment.

### What are the symptoms?

- Whooping cough starts like a cold with a blocked or runny nose, sneezing, a mild fever and an occasional cough.
- The cough gets worse and severe bouts of uncontrollable coughing develop. Coughing bouts can be followed by vomiting, choking or taking a big gasping breath which causes a “whooping” sound. The cough can last for many weeks and can be worse at night.
- Some newborns don’t cough at all but stop breathing and turn blue.
- Older children and adults may just have a mild cough that doesn’t go away.

### How is whooping cough spread?

- A person with whooping cough can spread it to others in the first 3 weeks of illness. Bacteria coughed into the air can be inhaled by babies, children or adults nearby. These people are then in danger of getting whooping cough.



## PROTECT

### Protect your baby

- Newborns are not immune until they have had their whooping cough vaccines. To protect them until they are immune, keep people with a cough away from your baby.
- The vaccine for babies is given at 2, 4 and 6 months. The first dose can be given as early as 6 weeks. Immunise your baby on time so they can be protected as soon as possible. If your baby’s vaccines are overdue, speak to your GP about catching up.
- Whooping cough vaccine is effective but doesn’t protect all babies. You still need to watch out, even if your baby is immunised.

#### Older children

- By immunising older children with boosters at 4 years and in high school, you give them some protection against whooping cough. This also helps to reduce spread to others.
- Check if your child has been vaccinated. Speak to your immunisation provider or GP or ring the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register on 1800 653 809.
- Remember that even immunised children can sometimes catch whooping cough.

#### Adults

- Adults can get whooping cough and can spread the infection to babies. They may just have mild symptoms and may not realise that their cough could cause harm.
- If you’re a new parent, you can top-up your immunity by getting a whooping cough booster. Boosters are also recommended for grandparents, couples planning a pregnancy, and for child care workers and health care workers.
- Whooping cough vaccines can be accessed from your GP, Aboriginal Medical Service, community health centre or council clinic.



## PREVENT

### How can I prevent the spread of whooping cough?

- Whooping cough is highly infectious in the first 3 weeks. It spreads easily through families, childcare centres and schools, so it’s important to act fast.
- Anyone with symptoms should see a doctor as soon as possible. Your GP can test for whooping cough. Early diagnosis is especially important for new parents and people who have regular contact with babies.
- If whooping cough is detected early enough, your doctor may prescribe a course of antibiotics. After 5 days of treatment, enough bacteria are killed to stop spread to others.
- In some situations, other people who have been in contact with an infectious person may also need antibiotics to help prevent the infection, especially if they are babies or if they have close contact with babies.
- People diagnosed with whooping cough should stay away from work, school or childcare until no longer infectious. Ask your doctor when it’s safe to return.

