WHOOPING COUGH

What is it?

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a chest infection caused by bacteria. It is most common in children but can occur at any age.

What are the symptoms?

Initial symptoms are of catarrh and a cold which then develop into a cough. Children often whoop or vomit after a spasm of coughing. Babies can become quite exhausted by the coughing and may have difficulty in feeding because of it. The illness may last for a number of weeks and severe cases, although rare, can occasionally result in brain damage.

Is it infectious?

Yes. People with whooping cough are infectious from 2 to 4 days before they start coughing until up to 21 days afterwards. Antibiotics can shorten the infectious period to 5 days if started early in the illness. Non-infectious coughing may continue for some weeks.

What is the incubation period?

Usually between 7 and 10 days.

Is there any treatment?

The main treatment is care of babies by observation, lifting them if they cough, preventing inhalation of vomit and feeding as necessary. Some children may need to be nursed in hospital. Antibiotics can help to shorten the illness.

How soon can someone return to school or work?

After 5 days of antibiotics and as soon as they feel well.

Can whooping cough be prevented?

YES. Whooping cough vaccine is part of the normal childhood vaccination schedule given at 2, 3 and 4 months. It provides very good protection against whooping cough.

Close household contacts who are not protected by up-to-date vaccination may be given antibiotics to prevent spread.