

February, 2014

## **Whooping cough study reminds parents to keep vaccinations up to date**

Parents are reminded to be vigilant in the lead up to their child's four-year-old whooping cough booster injection after a national study of the effectiveness of the vaccine revealed protection against the disease wanes in children at two to three years of age.

The study involved 4,000 children aged two to 47 months diagnosed with laboratory-confirmed whooping cough and was conducted by the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS).

Findings suggested that the acellular pertussis vaccine reduced the risk of pertussis by 55% after the first dose, with protection increasing to around 84% after the second dose. Good protection was retained until the age of two years but declined to 71% between two and three years and 59% between three and four years prior to the next booster being due.

Dr Helen Quinn, NCIRS research fellow said while the effectiveness of the vaccine does decrease in this age group, the findings should not alarm parents but rather be an important reminder of the need to keep vaccinations up to date.

"This study doesn't change the fact that the whooping cough vaccine is a very valuable and worthwhile vaccine for children to receive, but it does emphasise the importance of being immunised on time," Dr Quinn said.

"The first dose should be given early – from six weeks of age – with the second and third doses following at four months and six months. The fourth dose can now be given from three and a half years and should be given no later than the age of four years."

"Immunised children are much less likely to contract whooping cough or if they do, it is likely to be a milder form of the disease compared to unvaccinated children," she said, "Severe disease requiring hospitalisation is very uncommon in fully vaccinated children."

The study was led by Dr Quinn alongside Professor Peter McIntyre, Dr Tom Snelling and Associate Professor Kristine Macartney from that NCIRS and has since been published in US journal *Pediatrics*.

**Media Contact**  
Sarah Palmer  
(02) 9845 0512