

MEDIA RELEASE

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Act now to protect you, your family, and the community from whooping cough

The Australian Medical Association is calling on pregnant women, parents, and caregivers to ensure they are vaccinated against whooping cough (pertussis), amid a concerning surge in cases across the country.

Pertussis, commonly known as 'whooping cough', is a respiratory disease caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. It is highly infectious among unvaccinated people and can be life-threatening, particularly for newborns and young children.

Australia is currently experiencing its most significant and long-lasting outbreak in decades, with more than 57,000 cases reported in 2024 alone — the highest annual total since 1991 — and ongoing high rates. Some areas, including Queensland and Western Australia's Kimberley region, are seeing particularly high rates of infection. In South Australia, more than 1,000 cases were recorded in early 2025 — 11 times higher than the same period the previous year.

AMA President Dr Danielle McMullen described the resurgence of whooping cough cases as "extremely concerning", especially in light of below-target vaccination rates and growing vaccine hesitancy.

"We can't afford to be complacent," Dr McMullen said. "Each year, thousands of lives are lost to respiratory diseases like whooping cough — and we all have a role to play in preventing their spread. Vaccination remains our most powerful defence."

Dr McMullen stressed the importance of maternal vaccination in pregnancy and vaccination of carers to protect infants who are most at risk and urged all Australians — especially those in close contact with newborns — to check their vaccination history and speak to their GP if needed.

"Boosting immunisation rates is critical. Every pregnant woman should receive a dose of a pertussis-containing vaccine during each pregnancy to protect their newborn from whooping cough. Maternal vaccination creates antibodies which are passed to the unborn baby and protect them in their first days and weeks of life.

"But it doesn't stop there — ensuring family members and other caregivers are also vaccinated helps create a protective cocoon around infants and protect them as they build immunity through the infant vaccination schedule."

Free whooping cough vaccines are available to all pregnant women, with vaccination recommended between 20 and 32 weeks of each pregnancy to ensure protective antibodies are passed on to the unborn baby.

Parents and carers should also ensure children receive their vaccinations on time, especially during the first six months of life, when they are most vulnerable. Anyone who is in close contact with a newborn is encouraged to check they have had a pertussis booster vaccine in the past 10 years.

"Getting vaccinated is one of the simplest and most effective ways you can protect your loved ones and your community," Dr McMullen said. "We must not lose sight of the fact that immunisation saves lives."

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