



**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP  
Minister for Health and Ageing**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

25 November 2011

**Protecting Babies from Whooping Cough**

Parents of newborns will receive the latest advice on what they can do to protect their babies from whooping cough (pertussis) in a new public health campaign, Minister for Health and Ageing Nicola Roxon said today.

“Whooping cough is a serious, contagious respiratory infection that puts babies at risk of hospitalisation or even death. It is particularly dangerous to babies aged under six months,” Minister Roxon said.

“The best protection for a baby is a course of three vaccinations — at two months after birth, at four months, and then at six months of age. It’s also important for parents to keep an unprotected baby away from people with a cough.

“The aim of our new campaign is to let parents and healthcare providers know how they can become better at identifying the disease, how their babies can be protected, and how to help prevent whooping cough from spreading.”

The Government mail-out to new parents is part of a national pertussis awareness strategy developed by the Department of Health and Ageing and the state and territory governments. The campaign is raising the community’s awareness of the risk of whooping cough to newborn infants and provides information on how to prevent transmission and underlines the importance of infant vaccination and early diagnosis and treatment for whooping cough in infants and their carers.

Women planning a pregnancy, and their partners, are the main targets of the awareness campaign. Others targeted include grandparents, adults working with, or caring for, young children — such as childcare workers and healthcare workers. GPs and other immunisation providers will be provided supplementary education workshops.

Vaccination does not provide lifelong protection from whooping cough. As children grow up, booster vaccinations can be provided at the age of four — and then during their teenage years. This extends their protection.

Adolescents and adults, including women during pregnancy, can have vaccinations to protect their own health. Whooping cough is not just a childhood disease, as adolescents and adults can account for half the cases in the community.

**For more information, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220**

### **Background on whooping cough**

Between 1 January 2008 and 28 July 2011, seven infants, all aged eight weeks or less and too young to be protected by vaccination, died in Australia from whooping cough. The current whooping cough epidemic began in mid-2008, and Australia has been having its highest levels of whooping cough for two decades.

Whooping cough notifications to the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System jumped from 4,864 in 2007 to 34,785 in 2010.

Despite an apparent peak of whooping cough notifications in late 2010, the disease's activity in 2011 has remained high — with 27,138 notifications in the first nine months of this year.