

Mum says get vaccinated

When Taupō mum Miriama Turei's daughter Tellen Church started coughing and getting distressed one night, Miriama knew there was something seriously wrong.

Miriama took Tellen to the doctor several times but the little girl deteriorated quickly. She was sent to Rotorua Hospital, where she and her mum spent 10 days in isolation. That's when the whoop started. Miriama had to watch her six week old baby having coughing fits for up to seven minutes at a time, 12 times an hour, struggling to breathe and turning blue from whooping cough.

Luckily Tellen, now a happy four-year-old, was breastfed and had been immunised at six weeks with her first of the three whooping cough immunisations. Doctors told her that first immunisation gave Tellen a small amount of protection or she could have been much worse. Breastfeeding is also a protective factor and it settled and comforted Tellen when the going was really tough.

Miriama says when whooping cough sets in, it is terrible.

"You think every time she starts coughing she's not going to breathe. It's continuous. Without the suction and the oxygen I don't think she would have survived."

Miriama had no idea that whooping cough is often spread by adults who are highly infectious for two weeks before symptoms appear. At the time, the whole family was coughing, they were all swabbed and it was found Tellen's dad had whooping cough.

"It freaked me out. I didn't realise whooping cough is an adult disease spread by adults. Babies are the most vulnerable to a sickness and they suffer. To them it's life threatening. To us it's just a cough. People need to



HAPPY AND HEALTHY: Tellen Church (right), pictured with mum Miriama Turei and baby brother Turei Church, became seriously ill for months with whooping cough when she was just six weeks old.

be aware of that."

Miriama was nervous when she went home because she didn't have the oxygen and suction.

"It was terrible at home. It was scary, but I had to be strong for my baby. Even when we came home from hospital she had coughing fits and woke up every night coughing and unsettled. I had heaps of support from my whānau, but I lost 7kg from the stress."

Miriama says she's always drilling her friends about protecting their babies.

"When they say they don't like the needle or hearing their baby cry from an immunisation, I say harden up, you do not want to go through what I did. If baby gets sick you

will never forgive yourself.

"It breaks my heart that the disease is preventable. Sickness like whooping cough shouldn't even be around when there are things to keep it at bay like immunisation. I think it's a selfish decision from parents really if they don't get baby immunised. These diseases are ones that can be prevented. Why would you put that on your kids?"

Community paediatrician Belinda Coulter says while there is not a whooping cough epidemic at present, the disease is still around and immunisation is the best way of protecting babies.

Getting immunised when pregnant gives baby some protection as the antibodies

pass from mother to baby. Dr Coulter says up to 50 per cent of whooping cough cases in young babies are transmitted from the mother or other close family member.

All other close family members of the household such as dads and grandparents should have a whooping cough immunisation as they could be at risk of passing it on to baby. The immunisation is subsidised for pregnant mothers and children as part of the childhood vaccination programme.

■ **Anyone with questions about the whooping cough immunisation should talk to their doctor. Call 0800 IMMUNE or visit immune.org.nz or health.govt.nz**