

Whooping cough cure NZH

In 1949 my three-month-old son developed whooping cough — he caught it from his two-year-old sister — and someone suggested taking the children up in an unpressurised aeroplane because this would cure them. At that time my husband had a friend who owned such a plane at Mangere and he readily agreed to try out this theory. I am pleased to say it worked and the children recovered very quickly.

Constance Johnson.
Waikowhai.

Kids with whooping cough got a real high

My late father was one of many club pilots in the late 1940s who took babies and young children in light aircraft (usually Austers) up to 10,000ft altitude for a certain length of time (maybe an hour) for the whooping cough "cure." It was believed that the reduction in oxygen at this altitude killed the whooping cough bacillus.

The flights were usually done with a GP's knowledge and approval. Picture a planeload of miserable, sick children with perhaps one adult to keep an eye on them, in bumpy, wintry weather, but it worked. Often, by the time the plane was back on the ground, the children were considerably better, with breathing difficulties much reduced.

It became a thing of the past when immunisation for babies came in.

V.Sanders.
Howick.

Jury out on altitude cure for whooping cough cases

AT3 NZT Oct 1, 2004

With notified cases of whooping cough at epidemic levels — 350 new cases in August alone, says the Ministry of Health — sufferers will stop at nothing to find a cure.

Daniel Harpur-Gifkins, 13, and Michael Barr, 40, flew 3050m up into Marlborough's snow-capped mountains this week, hoping the flight would provide a miraculous release from continuous coughing.

It was reported last month that retired Nelson GP Miles Hursthouse said whooping cough sufferers needed to fly at an altitude of 3050m or more for 20 minutes to rid themselves of the ailment.

"It's a wee bit early to see any sort of results at the moment. I think normally it takes a couple of days before you can see an improvement, so we will just have to wait and see," said Daniel's mother, Leigh Gifkins.

But after the first night he still had the odd cough, she said.

"From what I've heard of other

people going up in planes, like down south, it was one or two days until they could notice the difference," she said.

Michael Barr said he was feeling a lot better after his flight, which may finally have beaten the whooping cough after two months of coughing.

Last week the Ministry of Health revealed that notified cases of pertussis or whooping cough were at epidemic levels in New Zealand.

More than 350 cases were notified in August, and 70 per cent of cases were from the South Island.

Another 132 cases were notified in the week ending September 10.

The highest number of cases notified in a week in New Zealand was 148 during the last epidemic.

Medical Officer of Health Maree Leonard said pertussis — described by some as the 100-day cough — had continued to spread.

Ten per cent of the 140 reported cases had been in pre-schoolers.

— NZPA

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Pie in sky treatment

A WHOOPING cough epidemic is sweeping the country, but a supposed cure is being left in the clouds.

And it seems doctors just can't see it.

The cure, according to an Auckland woman, is a high altitude plane ride.

"My late father was one of many club pilots in the late 1940's who took babies and young children in light aircraft up to 10,000ft altitude as a whooping cough cure," says the woman who did not want

By STEVE HOPKINS

to be named.

"It was believed the reduction in oxygen at this altitude killed the Whooping Cough bacillus.

She added: "In those days rural GP's, who had plane licences, would take the kids with the really bad cases up. Or they would refer them to friends with licences."

She said when the plane landed the children were considerably better.

Their breathing difficulties had improved dramatically.

But doctors doubt the woman's theory.

Whooping cough expert Dr Cameron Grant, from Auckland's Starship Children's Hospital, said the aeroplane cure sounded more like a myth.

He said immunisation was now an effective way of preventing whooping cough. And antibiotics worked well to clear up coughing.

But the woman says her father's log book was full of entries detailing his trips and the reason

for them.

She was not willing to show Truth the log book.

The Aero Club's chief flying instructor Robin Porter said the plane trips were a bit before his time, but they did happen.

"It didn't just happen in Auckland," he said. "It happened in clubs everywhere. I don't have any personal experience with it, but I remember sitting around the club when I was younger and hearing the pilots talking about it."

Whooping cough causes an estimated 300,000 deaths a year.

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Families thankful of high altitude cure

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High-flying seems to be more than just pie in the sky treatment to cure whooping cough - just ask the families who have benefited from the 2700m journey.

The Timaru Herald has followed two families -- the Fettes and the Katenes -- through the high altitude treatment and both confirm it worked.

For the Katene sisters Sonnie, 6, and Johanna, 11, the flight had instant results. Their mum, Kelly, said that the girls haven't coughed since.

The girls had suffered from whooping cough for about two months before they took the flight last month. They contracted whooping cough despite being immunised against it.

After the flight the girls had their first uninterrupted sleep in two to three weeks.

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"I kept waking up expecting to hear the girls coughing," Mrs Katene said.

Since the flight, the Katenes have been inundated with people wanting to know if it cured whooping cough.

Mrs Katene assures people it has.

"We were at the stage where we would have done anything to get rid of the cough."

Meanwhile, the mum of 21-month-old Taylor Fettes, Carol, said her son was cured. She put this down to the flight.

"It must have been the flight because we have tried everything else."

Meanwhile, an epidemic of whooping cough (pertussis) is on its way, according to South Canterbury medical officer of health Daniel Williams.

He said parents can help their children avoid succumbing to the disease by having them immunised.

South Canterbury Aeroclub president John Scott said the club had fielded several inquiries about flights, including one from the Wairarapa.

"They talked through the procedure with the chief flying instructor and I'm sure one of our affiliated clubs in the Wairarapa will be performing the service for them. But if there are any local families here who want to do it they should contact our club and we can organise the flights."

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