Pertussis is a highly communicable, vaccine preventable disease, which causes significant morbidity in unvaccinated individuals. In Germany, the general recommendation for pertussis vaccination was discontinued in 1975 because of concerns regarding the safety of whole cell pertussis vaccines. Vaccination coverage rates subsequently dropped from 50–60% to approximately 15% and, as a consequence, pertussis has become one of the most frequent endemic infections in German infants and children, with an estimated incidence of 180 cases per 100 000 per year. Pertussis infant vaccination was generally recommended again in 1991, but vaccination coverage only increased rapidly after the licensure of acellular pertussis (acP) vaccines in 1994. This was due, firstly, to the better acceptance of the less reactogenic acP vaccines, and secondly, to the availability of acP vaccines in combination vaccines.  

A survey of vaccination coverage in 1999 found a pertussis vaccination coverage of 91% in a German infant population for the first three doses given at 2, 3, and 4 months of age. Another survey in 2001/2002 found a pertussis vaccination coverage in former West Germany of 27% in 12–17 year old adolescents compared to 61% in 7–11 year olds and 83% in 2–6 year old children, documenting the change from a predominantly non-vaccinated population to a population with high pertussis vaccination coverage over the course of about 10 years.

An ongoing pertussis vaccine, long term efficacy study permitted us to introduce prospective long term surveillance in a highly vaccinated population of children between 3 and 8 years of age in German paediatric practices. Our objective was to determine the incidence and to describe the clinical spectrum of B pertussis and B parapertussis disease in this population after the introduction of acP vaccines. In addition, we investigated whether we could find an increase in B parapertussis infections in a situation involving questionable or, at the most, a low efficacy of licensed acP vaccines against B parapertussis.  

**METHODS**  

**Study population**  

A population based case-control study was carried out in Germany from February 1993 to May 1995 to determine the efficacy of Biken DTaP vaccine. The study population consisted of 16 780 children born between December 1992 and June 1994, recruited in 63 paediatric practices. The children were vaccinated at the age of 3, 5, 7, and 15–24 months, either with Biken acP vaccine (received by 75%) or with a whole cell pertussis vaccine (received by 11% of the study population), or were not vaccinated against pertussis (14%) by decision of their parents or guardian. Pertussis vaccine catch up vaccinations were offered to study participants after licensure of acP vaccines for general infant vaccination in 1995. The data presented here refer to the period 1997 to 1999, when pertussis surveillance was reestablished in 45 of the initial 63 paediatric practices to determine the long term efficacy of the pertussis vaccines in the study population. The 45 practices had initially recruited 14 144 children into the study population, of which 11 087 (78%) were still regularly seen in the practice in 1997. In addition to the children of the original study population the surveillance for Bordetella spp. was extended to all other children of the same age group presenting in the participating paediatric practices.

The vaccination status of the study population was determined in a random sample of 479 children: 88 (18.4%) were vaccinated with wcP vaccine, 263 (59.9%) with acP vaccine, 13.4% with both wcP and acP vaccine (usually three wcP doses followed by a acP dose), and 8.3% were not vaccinated against pertussis. Children were between 3 and 8 years of age and were considered to be fully vaccinated if they
had received at least four doses of any pertussis vaccine. All other children, who had received three or less doses of pertussis vaccine, were considered to be partially vaccinated. As there were only 13 Bordetella spp. cases who were partially vaccinated, most of whom had received three doses of pertussis vaccine, several of the following analyses combine fully and partially vaccinated Bordetella spp. cases into one group.

**Bordetella pertussis and Bordetella parapertussis surveillance**

Between June 1997 and December 1999, nasopharyngeal swabs (NPS) were obtained from all children born between December 1992 and June 1994 who presented in the practice with any cough of ≥7 days duration. If children presented with any cough of ≥21 days duration, blood was taken for serological detection of pertussis antibodies.

**Laboratory procedures**

*B. pertussis* and *B. parapertussis* cultures were performed as described previously. The swabs were plated on charcoal horse blood agar supplemented with cephalixin, and stored in sterile tubes containing 0.4 ml of NaCl solution (0.9%). Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) was performed in this solution using primers from insertion sequence elements IS481 and IS1001, specific for *B. pertussis* and *B. parapertussis* as described previously in detail. Single serum serology analyses for *B. pertussis* and *B. parapertussis* infections were performed using a standardised enzyme immunoassay to measure isotopic antibodies (IgG and IgA) to pertussis toxin and filamentous haemagglutinin FHA. Antibody levels beyond the 95th centile of an age matched control cohort were regarded as indicative of recent contact, setting the specificity level at 0.95, as previously published by Wirsing von König and colleagues. Children who presented a significant anti-PT response either with or without an anti-FHA response, were classified as having *B. pertussis* infection. Children who only showed significant FHA antibody response without anti-PT response were classified as having *B. parapertussis* infection.

**Assessment of clinical presentation**

Parents of children with laboratory confirmed bordetella infection were handed out diaries for a detailed daily documentation of typical symptoms for a total period of up to 42 days after start of cough. The recorded symptoms included: coughing, number of paroxysmal cough attacks, number of whooping attacks, vomiting, cyanosis, doctor visits, and hospitalisation.

**Statistical analysis**

Differences in symptoms and duration were evaluated with a $\chi^2$ distribution or Fisher’s exact test, where appropriate. Calculations were performed with SSPS and SAS software. The incidence rates were calculated in the prospectively recruited study population for both study periods February 1993 to May 1995 and June 1997 to December 1999. Incidence rates were calculated as the number of new bordetella infections over the study population for both study periods February 1993 to May 1995 and June 1997 to December 1999.

### RESULTS

Between May 1997 and March 1999, a total of 180 children (mean age 4.2 years, range 2.2–6.0 years) were diagnosed with bordetella infections. Among the 180 bordetella infections there were 116 (64%) *B. pertussis* and 64 (36%) *B. parapertussis* infections. Seventy nine of the 116 *B. pertussis* infections (68%) were diagnosed either by PCR (75/79, 95%) or culture (39/79, 49%), whereas 37/116 *B. pertussis* cases (32%) were diagnosed by serology only. Forty two of the 64 *B. parapertussis* infections (66%) were diagnosed either by PCR (5/42, 12%) or culture (38/42, 90%), whereas 22/64 *B. parapertussis* cases (34%) were diagnosed by serology only.

In the prospectively recruited study cohort the incidence rate of *B. pertussis* infections was 4.8 per 1000 person-years, whereas the incidence for *B. parapertussis* infection was 2.8 per 1000 person-years. For comparison in the first study period between 1993 and 1995 the incidence rates of *B. pertussis* was calculated to be 21.7 per 1000 person-years and 1.6 per 1000 person-years for *B. parapertussis* infection.

A total of 124 of the 180 bordetella cases (69%) were fully vaccinated, 13 (7%) were partially vaccinated, and 43 (24%) were not vaccinated against pertussis. Of the 116 *B. pertussis* cases, 72 (62.0%) were fully vaccinated and 9 (7.8%) were partially vaccinated against pertussis with the following vaccines: wPvP vaccine (n = 8, 6.9%); acP (n = 60, 51.7%); both wP and acP vaccine (usually three wP doses followed by an acP dose; n = 13; 11.2%). Thirty five children (30.2%) had never received any dose of pertussis vaccine. Twenty eight of the 35 unvaccinated *B. pertussis* cases were diagnosed by either PCR (28/28, 100%) or culture (18/28, 64%); an additional seven cases were diagnosed by serology only. Of the 81 vaccinated *B. pertussis* cases, 51 were diagnosed by either PCR (47/51, 92%) or culture (21/51, 41%); an additional 30 cases were diagnosed by serology only.

Of the 64 *B. parapertussis* cases, 52 (81%) were fully vaccinated, 4 (6%) were partially vaccinated, and 8 (13%) had never received any vaccination against pertussis.

Table 1 shows differences in clinical symptoms between *B. pertussis* and *B. parapertussis* infections. Children with *B. pertussis* infections presented with a significantly longer duration of all symptoms than children with *B. parapertussis* infection. *B. pertussis* cases showed cough ≥42 days in 64%, paroxysms ≥21 days in 53%, whooping ≥21 days in 22%, and vomiting in 50%, compared to 38% (p = 0.0007), 22% (p = 0.0001), 5% (p = 0.002), and 25% (p = 0.0011) for the *B. parapertussis* cases, respectively.

Significant differences in the clinical presentation were also found between *B. pertussis* cases who had received at least one dose of a pertussis vaccine and unvaccinated *B. pertussis* cases (table 2). Besides the total duration of any cough, all other cough symptoms and their duration were clearly reduced in the cases vaccinated against pertussis compared to the unvaccinated cases. Forty one per cent of those vaccinated had paroxysms ≥21 days compared to 83% of the unvaccinated cases (p = 0.0001). Whooping ≥21 days was seen in 14% of the vaccinated and in 43% of the unvaccinated cases (p = 0.0019). Forty per cent of the vaccinated had vomiting compared to 74% of the unvaccinated cases (p = 0.0012).

A comparison between the symptoms of vaccinated *B. pertussis* and vaccinated *B. parapertussis* cases did not show significant differences with regard to the duration of any cough, but revealed significant differences with regard to the

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**Table 1** Clinical symptoms in 116 children with *B. pertussis* and 64 children with *B. parapertussis* infection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>B. pertussis n=116 (64%)</th>
<th>B. parapertussis n=64 (36%)</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cough ≥42 days</td>
<td>74 (64%)</td>
<td>24 (38%)</td>
<td>0.0007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paroxysmal cough</td>
<td>87 (75%)</td>
<td>39 (61%)</td>
<td>0.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paroxysm ≥21 days</td>
<td>62 (53%)</td>
<td>14 (22%)</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whooping</td>
<td>63 (54%)</td>
<td>19 (30%)</td>
<td>0.0015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whooping ≥21 days</td>
<td>26 (22%)</td>
<td>3 (5%)</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting</td>
<td>58 (50%)</td>
<td>16 (25%)</td>
<td>0.0011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting ≥21 days</td>
<td>9 (8%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0.0276</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Clinical symptoms of B pertussis infection in 81 pertussis vaccinated* children and 35 unvaccinated children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B pertussis cases (n=116)</th>
<th>B pertussis vaccinated (n=81)</th>
<th>B pertussis unvaccinated (n=35)</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cough &gt;21 days</td>
<td>74 (91%)</td>
<td>35 (100%)</td>
<td>0.1038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paroxysmal cough</td>
<td>54 (67%)</td>
<td>33 (94%)</td>
<td>0.0023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paroxysm &gt;21 days</td>
<td>33 (41%)</td>
<td>29 (83%)</td>
<td>0.0001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whooping</td>
<td>38 (47%)</td>
<td>25 (71%)</td>
<td>0.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whooping &gt;21 days</td>
<td>11 (14%)</td>
<td>15 (43%)</td>
<td>0.0019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting</td>
<td>32 (40%)</td>
<td>26 (74%)</td>
<td>0.0012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting &gt;21 days</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td>6 (17%)</td>
<td>0.0182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Pertussis vaccinated with either three (n=9) or four doses (n=72) of the following vaccines: wcP vaccine (n=8); acP vaccine (n=60); both wcP and acP vaccine (usually three wcP doses followed by an acP dose, n=13).

The typical clinical picture of B pertussis whooping cough disease was found in almost all unvaccinated children, whereas the majority of vaccinated children had a significantly shorter cough duration and milder symptoms. This observation confirms data of the previously published efficacy study in the same population, where the Biken acP vaccine showed a significantly better efficacy against typical pertussis disease than against milder or less typical pertussis disease. B pertussis presented in general as a disease associated with milder symptoms of coughing. However, about one third of the children with B parapertussis infection had a disease presenting prolonged cough with typical whooping cough symptoms, as well as paroxysms, whooping, and vomiting. Other recent studies also confirmed that B parapertussis may cause symptoms similar to B pertussis. Therefore, clinical symptoms alone do not allow one to make a distinction between B pertussis and B parapertussis diseases, especially in populations with a high and sustained pertussis vaccination coverage. Further surveillance of Bordetella spp. in highly immunised populations is necessary in order to document changes in the epidemiology and clinical picture of bordetella infections and to target additional preventive measures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Authors’ affiliations
J G Liese, C Renner, S Stojanov, B H Belohradsky, University Children’s Hospital Munich, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Lindwurmstr. 4, 80357 Munich, Germany.
REFERENCES

POSTCARD FROM THE ROAD

Shoeshine

On impulse I asked the lady having her shoes shined how much the boy was charging. Around 50p ($0.75 or €0.75) seemed good—cheap enough to afford while travelling on a tight budget, expensive enough to feel like there were two sides to the deal. The box on which he made me put my foot was roughly made but contained the tools he needed—soap, wax, polish, clothes, and brushes—to give my shoes a shine they’d not had since I first bought them.

About halfway through the shine I realised that I was breaking a UN convention. Forget that I was paying what was locally a good sum of money for the work. Forget that I was going to give him a pen too—big deal: have you ever met a shoeshine boy. But a part of me will recognise that for too many people, but not for satisfying the greed of some”.

We feel justifiably pleased—maybe even smug—about our own laws which aim to protect children. This is comparable to the smugness we felt in the days of empire, when we pointed out to less enlightened nations that we didn’t use slaves. Well, not in Britain we didn’t, because we had plenty working for us all over the rest of the Empire and beyond. We owe our current place towards the top of the developed world hierarchy to that exploitation, and we maintain our place there in a manner which is only slightly less exploitative.

The developing world—some parts more than others—is developing as a consequence of the efforts of its workforce, often employed under extraordinarily competitive conditions by companies who will move production from country to country to secure the lowest price—or, depending on your view, the highest efficiency. In some of these countries the undergar work force is an important contributor to that efficiency. Our position—the UN’s position—is very threatening to the economic growth of these countries. After all, they say, badly paraphrasing Gandhi, that not every country can be a Britain, with an entire India to plunder and exploit. They have to create their economic growth from within, using what they regard as their own strengths—which often means their undergar workforce.

At the heart of it, however, I cannot find fault in the UN convention. I’ll continue to feel guilty until my shoes are scuffed again. Then perhaps I’ll forget a bit, in the same way that I can deny the source of my prosperity when I’m back at home and can no longer see the polish blackened hands of the shoeshine boy. But a part of me will recognise that for too much of my life I live in the wrong half of another quote from Gandhi: “Earth has enough to satisfy the need of all the people, but not for satisfying the greed of some”.

Later that evening in the same square the band set up and began to play. Lovers kissed and middle class families walked with their children, pausing sometimes to allow another child to clean their shoes.

I D Wacogne
Ian Wacogne is a consultant in general paediatrics
Birmingham Children’s Hospital, UK

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