

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

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Pertussis

What is Pertussis?

Pertussis is a very contagious respiratory disease caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*. It is commonly called "whooping cough". Pertussis is more severe for babies. It can cause pneumonia and convulsions. In rare cases it can cause death.

Who can get Pertussis?

Anyone can get Pertussis, but it is seen more often in young children.

What are the symptoms of Pertussis?

Pertussis starts like the common cold, with runny nose or congestion, sneezing, and maybe mild cough or fever. After 1-2 weeks, severe coughing begins. Vomiting may follow coughing.

How is Pertussis spread?

Pertussis is most contagious during the first two weeks of illness. People infected with Pertussis usually spread the disease by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who breathe in the pertussis bacteria.

How long after exposure do symptoms begin?

Symptoms typically begin 7-10 days after exposure.

How can Pertussis be prevented?

The best way to prevent Pertussis is to get vaccinated. The vaccine for children is called DTaP. It protects children against three diseases: diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis. For maximum protection against Pertussis, children need five DTaP shots. The first three are given at two, four, and six months of age. The fourth shot is given between 15 and 18 months of age, and a fifth shot is given when a child enters school at four to six years of age. A Pertussis booster vaccine (Tdap) is recommended at 11-12 years of age. Adults should get one dose of Tdap booster in place of their next tetanus (Td) booster (which is given every 10 years). Getting vaccinated with Tdap is especially important for families with and caregivers of infants less than 12 months of age. Babies who get Pertussis are often infected by parents, older siblings, or caregivers who might not even know they have the disease.

- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when sneezing or coughing or turn away when coughing.
- Immediately throw away used tissues, followed by careful handwashing.
- Avoid sharing objects if they have been in the mouth (pacifiers, toys, silverware, etc.); wash objects in hot, soapy water between use.
- If directly exposed to a person with Pertussis, a doctor can give antibiotics to help prevent illness.

HAND WASHING INSTRUCTIONS:

- use soap and running water
- rub your hands vigorously for 20 seconds
- wash all surfaces, including:
 - backs of hands
 - wrists
 - between fingers
 - under fingernails
- rinse well
- dry hands with a paper towel
- turn off the water using a paper towel instead of bare hands

For more information on Pertussis, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

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