



PERTUSSIS (Whooping Cough)

What is PERTUSSIS (Whooping Cough)?

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) is a highly contagious bacterial infection that can cause an uncontrollable, violent cough lasting several weeks or even months. The *Bordetella pertussis* bacterium is found in the mouth, nose and throat of an infected person. Parapertussis is a bacterial illness similar to pertussis but is not as common and generally causes less severe symptoms.

How is pertussis spread?

Pertussis primarily spreads from person to person by direct contact with mucous or droplets from the nose and throat of infected individuals.

Who gets pertussis?

Pertussis can occur at any age. Children who are too young to be fully vaccinated and those who have not yet completed the primary vaccination series are at highest risk for severe disease. Adult caregivers are the most common source of disease to infants, as well as other household members.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

A person can become sick up to three weeks after they have been in close contact with an infected person. On average, illness usually begins in 9-10 days.

What are the signs and symptoms of pertussis?

Pertussis begins like a mild cold with a cough. Within a few weeks, the cough becomes severe. Coughing may end with a high-pitched “whoop.” Fever usually is mild. Vomiting may occur after severe coughing spells.

How long can a person spread pertussis?

An infected person can spread the disease from when symptoms begin to three weeks after the onset of coughing. The contagious period is reduced to five days after treatment with proper antibiotics.

How do I know if I have pertussis?

Laboratory tests are required for a confirmatory diagnosis. A health care provider can examine you to determine if your illness is suggestive of pertussis.

Is there a vaccine against pertussis?

Yes. The vaccine is usually given at two, four, and six months of age, again at 15-18 months; and then at 4-6 years of age. The vaccine must be given before coming into contact with the pertussis bacteria to stop the infection. A single dose booster to provide protection from pertussis, tetanus and diphtheria in children 11-18 years of age is also recommended.

Adult vaccination recommendations can be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5517a1.htm>

Is there a way to prevent the spread of this disease?

- Vaccination is the best way to prevent the spread of pertussis.
- Antibiotics can shorten the time period one person can infect another.
- People who live in the household of someone with pertussis should also take antibiotics to protect them from being infected.
- A person with pertussis, or suspected of having it, should be separated from young children and infants until completion of five days of antibiotics. If an ill person does not take an antibiotic, they should be separated for three weeks, starting from the onset of cough.