

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

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PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH)

Pertussis is a highly contagious bacterial infection that causes coughing and gagging with little or no fever. An infected person has cough episodes that may end in vomiting or cause a "whoop" sound when the person tries to breathe in.

SYMPTOMS

- Symptoms appear between 6 to 21 days (average 7-10) after exposure to the bacteria.
- The disease starts with cold symptoms: runny nose and cough. Sometime in the first 2 weeks, episodes of severe cough develop and that can last 1 to 2 months. The person may look and feel fairly healthy between these episodes.
- During bouts of cough, the lips and nails may turn blue for lack of air. Vomiting may occur after severe coughing spells.
- During the severe coughing stage, seizures or even death can occur, particularly in an infant.
- Immunized school children and adults have milder symptoms than young children.

POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS

- Pertussis is most dangerous to children less than 1 year of age. Complications for infants include pneumonia, convulsions and, in rare cases, brain damage or death.
- Serious complications are less likely in older children and adults.

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

- Pertussis is spread through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks.

- The greatest risk of spread is during the early stage when it appears to be a cold.
- Those treated with antibiotics are contagious until the first 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment has been completed.

WHO GETS IT?

- Anyone who is exposed can get pertussis.
- Unimmunized or inadequately immunized people are at higher risk for severe disease.
- Many cases occur in adults because protection from the vaccine lasts only 5 to 10 years after the last dose.

TREATMENT

- The vaccination against pertussis is included in the DTP and DtaP vaccines. Before age 7, children should get 5 doses of the DTP or DtaP vaccine. These are usually given at 2, 4, 6 and 15-18 months* of age and 4-6 years of age. (*This 4th dose may be given as early as 12 months of age.)
- Persons with pertussis should avoid contact with others until no longer contagious.
- Take your full course of antibiotic treatment.
- **If you live with or have been in close contact with someone who has pertussis, you should take preventive antibiotics.**

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice. For more information, please call your local health department at (916) 875-5881.