



PERTUSSIS (WHOOPING COUGH) FACT SHEET

What is Pertussis?

Pertussis, also called “whooping cough,” is a disease caused by bacteria. Pertussis is usually mild in older children and adults, but it often causes serious problems or even death in babies who have not been immunized.

How can you be exposed to Pertussis?

Pertussis can occur at any age. Severe illness is more common in young children. Pertussis vaccine prevents severe disease in young infants, but even a vaccinated person can get pertussis infection. Like a cold, pertussis spreads into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or talks. That is when others nearby can inhale the bacteria.

What are the symptoms of Pertussis?

Pertussis begins like a cold with a runny nose, sneezing, mild fever and a cough that slowly gets worse. Within two weeks, the cough becomes more severe and is characterized by episodes of rapid coughs followed by a high pitched “whooping” sound as they try to catch their breath. The cough is often worse at night.

Young children who have not been immunized have the most severe symptoms. Adults, teens, and vaccinated children often have milder symptoms. A person with a cough lasting more than one week without improvement should contact their health care provider to ensure the cough is not pertussis.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Most often symptoms appear within 7 to 10 days, with a range of 4-21 days after exposure to the infected person.

How long is a person with Pertussis contagious to others?

Persons with pertussis are most infectious at the beginning of the illness (cold-like symptoms), and during the first two weeks after the onset of the cough – approximately 21 days.

What is the treatment for Pertussis?

Treatment is most effective early in the disease. Antibiotics are used to treat the infected person and their close contacts. Persons treated with antibiotics are no longer

contagious after the first 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment have been completed. In addition, it is very helpful to get plenty of rest and fluids.

Can Pertussis be prevented?

Yes. Vaccination of children in early infancy can prevent pertussis. Pertussis vaccine is included in the DTaP and the new Tdap vaccine for adolescents and adults. It is not available as a single vaccine. Vaccine protection fades over time.

- Before age 7, children should get 5 doses of the DTaP vaccine
- Doses are usually given at two, four, six, and 15-18 months of age and 4-6 years of age.
- The 4th dose may be given as early as 12 months of age.

A one-time dose of Tdap is recommended for the following groups if they had not previously received a dose:

- Adults age 65 years and older who anticipate having close contact with an infant younger than 12 months of age (e.g., grandparents, child care providers, healthcare providers)
- Children ages 7 through 10 years who had not completed a full primary series of DTap

Other unvaccinated older adults (65 years and older) who do not anticipate having contact with an infant but want to be vaccinated with Tdap could be given a one-time dose. Tdap should be given as a single booster dose to 11-64 year old individuals.

Persons with cough illnesses should avoid contact with infants and expectant mothers and child care settings. Household members and others in close contact with an infected person can reduce their chances of getting pertussis by taking antibiotics, even if they have been vaccinated against the disease.

Where can I get more information on Pertussis?

www.cdc.gov

www.dshs.state.tx.us

Source of Information

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
Texas Department of State Health Services (TDSHS)