



PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH) FACT SHEET

What is pertussis?

- Pertussis, also called “whooping cough” is a disease caused by bacteria.
- It often causes serious problems in babies.
- It is usually milder in older children and adults.

Who gets pertussis?

- Pertussis can occur at any age, but infants and young children are at highest risk of life-threatening consequences.
- Recent outbreaks have shown that older children and adults carry the disease, which in its milder form is hard to recognize. Undiagnosed mild disease contributes to the spread of illness among infants and young children.
- Persons with mild pertussis can transmit the illness to un-immunized and partially immunized infants and young children who are more susceptible to severe illness and complications, such as pneumonia, encephalitis (brain inflammation) and seizures.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

- Cold-like in the beginning; runny nose, sneezing, mild fever, and cough.
- After one or two weeks, the cough gets worse and usually starts to occur in strong “coughing fits.” This may last six or more weeks. There is generally no fever during this time.
- In young children, coughing fits are often followed by a whooping sound as they try to catch their breath.
- After coughing, a person may have difficulty catching their breath, vomit or become blue in the face from lack of air. The coughing spells may be so bad that it is hard for babies to eat, drink or breathe.
- The cough is often worse at night, and cough medicines usually do not help reduce the cough.
- Between coughing spells, the person often appears to be well.
- Some babies may only have apnea (failure to breathe) and can die from this.
- Adults, teens and vaccinated children often have milder symptoms that mimic bronchitis or asthma.

How is pertussis spread?

- Bacteria live in the nose, mouth and throat and are sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks.
- Touching a tissue or sharing a cup can also spread the disease.
- The first symptoms usually appear five to 21 days after a person is infected.
- Older children, adolescents, adults and parents who may have a mild illness can spread the disease to infants and young children in the household.

Is pertussis dangerous?

- Pneumonia is the most common complication and cause of infantile pertussis-related deaths
- Young infants are also at highest risk for pertussis-related complication, including seizures, encephalopathy (swelling of the brain), otitis media (severe ear infection), anorexia (severe restriction of food intake) and dehydration.

How is pertussis diagnosed?

- A doctor may diagnose based on symptoms.
- To confirm the diagnosis, the doctor will swab the back of the nose for laboratory testing.
- It is important to remember that laboratory tests may be negative even if a patient has pertussis.

How do you treat it?

- Pertussis is treated with antibiotics.
- Patients are advised to take all prescribed medication and minimize close contact with others during the treatment period, especially small infants and children.

How do you prevent it?

- Cover your cough: Wash you hands.
- Babies should be kept away from all coughing people of any age.
- While there is no lifelong protection against pertussis, immunization is the best preventative measure for your child.
- The vaccine is the diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTaP) vaccine and should be administered in 5 doses: at 2, 4, 6, and 15-18 months of age and at 4-6 years. It is very important to receive all 5 doses for maximum protection.
- Vaccine protection begins to fade in older children after 5-10 years
- Vaccine is now available in the United States after 7 years of age. Booster vaccination with adolescent-adult formulation (Tdap) is recommended at 11-12 years of age and as “catch up” for those 13-18 years who have not already received Tdap or a Td booster. Adults should receive a single dose of Tdap to replace a single dose of Td.
- Consult your healthcare provider to be sure your child or adolescent has been vaccinated.

Is the pertussis vaccine safe?

- Yes, it is safe.
- Although there is a very slight risk of problems caused by the vaccine, the risk from getting the disease is much more serious.
- Pertussis causes about 15-25 deaths each year in the United States.
- Experts recommend that all babies and children be given the full series of pertussis vaccine unless there is a medical reason not to receive the vaccine.

Where can you get more information?

- Please contact Center for Human Development Public Health Services at (541) 962-8801, or
- Visit one of the following websites:

<http://www.cdc.gov>

<http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/acd/diseases/pertussis/pertussis.shtml>