

Pertussis General Information

What is pertussis?

Pertussis is a disease of the lungs and the throat caused by bacteria. It is also known as whooping cough. The germ that causes pertussis is very easily spread from person to person. It is spread by close contact with drops of fluid from the nose and throat of someone who has the disease. Pertussis can be spread to others from the time someone catches the disease until 3 weeks after the symptoms start. If the person is treated, then this time period would be only 5 days.

Who can get pertussis?

Anyone can get pertussis, though most severe cases occur in children less than one year of age. Older children and adults may get and spread the disease, but they usually only have mild symptoms.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- low fever
- cough, mild at first and then a deep rapid coughing and a “whoop”
- vomiting after coughing
- coughing is worse at night

These symptoms will start about 10 days after a person has been exposed but could appear 20 days later. The symptoms can last for 6-10 weeks. Although most people recover from the disease, some people can be very ill. Pneumonia and seizures can occur.

What is the treatment?

Pertussis is treated with an antibiotic prescribed by your health care provider. Some infants, children and adults who are in contact with the person with pertussis may also need to take an antibiotic.

It is important for children who have not started or completed their childhood immunizations to complete their immunizations. It is also important for teens and adults to get their booster dose if they have not already received it.

How can you prevent pertussis?

Every child should get pertussis vaccine at 2, 4, 6, 18 months and at 4-6 years of age.

School age children receive another booster of pertussis vaccine in Grade 7 in the School Immunization Program.

All adults, including pregnant women at 26 weeks gestation or greater who have not received a dose of pertussis vaccine in adulthood should receive a single dose for the prevention of pertussis, especially if they are in contact with pregnant women, infants and young children.