

About.....Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, also called whooping cough, is a contagious disease caused by *Bordetella pertussis* bacteria. It may cause severe coughing fits that can interfere with breathing. Although pertussis is often milder in older children and adults, undiagnosed persons can transmit the disease to infants and young children. Pertussis can lead to pneumonia, seizures, and sometimes death.

Most of these serious problems occur in infants who are younger than a year old.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

1. During the first stage, symptoms are similar to a cold: slight fever, sneezing, runny nose, dry cough, loss of appetite, and irritability.
2. During the second stage (about 1 to 2 weeks later), the cough becomes more intense. There may be short, intense coughing spells followed by a long gasp for air (this is when the “whoop” is heard). The coughing fits may be followed by vomiting, nose bleeds, or bluish color to the face.
3. During the third stage, the cough is less intense and less frequent, and appetite begins to increase. Eventually the cough stops, although this may take several months.

How is pertussis spread?

Pertussis is spread by contact with nose or throat secretions from an infected person. This can happen when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Without treatment, an infected person can spread the disease for up to three weeks from the time the cough begins. However, after five days of treatment with the appropriate antibiotic, an infected person cannot spread pertussis.

How do I know if I have pertussis?

If you have had close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with pertussis or you have symptoms that match those described above, you should consult your health care provider. Your health care provider may test you for pertussis and prescribe antibiotics for treatment.

How is pertussis treated?

While antibiotics make pertussis less contagious, they do not reduce the symptoms unless taken very early in the illness. All household members and other close contacts of persons with pertussis should receive antibiotic treatment to prevent transmission of the disease.

How can pertussis be prevented?

Be sure that children are up to date on vaccinations, especially the diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (DTaP) series. Some children and adults may also receive a dose of Tdap to provide further protection against pertussis. See your health care provider to determine if you need immunization against pertussis.

For additional information on pertussis, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/doc.do/id/0900f3ec80228696>

This page was last reviewed on June 5, 2007.