

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

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Pertussis

What is Pertussis?

Pertussis is a childhood disease caused by bacteria and is commonly called "whooping cough". It affects the respiratory tract.

What are the symptoms of Pertussis?

- An irritating cough, which after one to two weeks, causes the person to experience spasms and makes a high pitched "whoop" when coughing. The cough can last one to two months or longer. Infants less than six months old and adults often do not have the whoop.
- A clear mucous is often coughed up.
- Vomiting often follows the coughing.

How is Pertussis spread?

The bacteria are spread through the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or speaks and another person breathes in droplets from the infected person's nose, throat, or mouth. (A person is likely to spread Pertussis before the "whooping cough" stage actually begins).

How long after exposure do symptoms begin?

7-10 days.

Is Pertussis contagious?

Yes, Pertussis is very contagious from about 1 week before until 2 weeks after the "whooping cough" stage begins.

What can be done to prevent Pertussis?

Pertussis vaccine can prevent the illness in infants and children. A series of five shots is given from two months of age until school age, usually with the Diphtheria and Tetanus (DTaP) shots. A Pertussis booster vaccine is recommended at age 11-12 years and for all adults that have not previously received a booster shot. If an adult or child is exposed to Pertussis, a doctor can give them an antibiotic to decrease the likelihood of symptoms.

- **Vaccinate all children and give antibiotics to adults and children after exposure.**
- Cover mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing with a tissue or turn away when coughing.
- Immediately throw away used tissues, followed by careful handwashing.
- Avoid sharing objects (pacifiers, toys, silverware, etc.) if they have been in the mouth; wash objects in hot, soapy water between use.

HAND WASHING INSTRUCTIONS:

- use soap and running water
- rub your hands vigorously for 20 seconds
- wash all surfaces, including:
 - backs of hands
 - wrists
 - between fingers
 - under fingernails
- rinse well
- dry hands with a paper towel
- turn off the water using a paper towel instead of bare hands

For more information on Pertussis, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.

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