

Whooping Cough (Pertussis) Disease Fact Sheet

What is pertussis?

- Pertussis, also known as whooping cough is a vaccine –preventable disease caused by bacteria.
- At first symptoms are similar to a common cold.
- They include runny nose, watery eyes, mild fever and a cough.
- The cough worsens until the infected person has severe coughing spells.
- These coughing spells can last from 6-12 weeks.
- A high pitched gasp or whoop sound can often be heard after a coughing spell.
- These coughing spells can lead to difficulty breathing and vomiting.

How is pertussis spread?

- It is spread by the respiratory secretions (fluids from the mouth and nose of someone with pertussis disease
- When this person coughs or sneezes they are spreading the bacteria
- The bacteria must find it's way into the mucous membrane (nose, mouth) of another individual to spread the disease
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When do the symptoms start?

- Usually, between 7-10 days of being in contact with an individual with pertussis
- Symptoms can be delayed and can take up to 21 days to develop

How long are individuals spreading the disease?

- Pertussis is easiest to catch during the first 2 weeks when symptoms resemble a cold.
- After this the chance of spreading the disease decreases, but can last up to 3 weeks
- Individuals are no longer spreading the disease after 5 days of treatment on an appropriate antibiotic.

How is pertussis prevented?

- The best way to protect against the disease is to make sure both you and your child are up to date with your immunizations.
- Children receive vaccines containing pertussis at 2, 4, 6 and 18 months and 4-6 years of age.
- Between 14-16 years of age adolescents receive a booster shot containing pertussis

- Adults should receive one dose of pertussis containing vaccine
- You should see your healthcare provider if anyone in your household has a cough that lasts longer than a week.
- It is important to get an accurate diagnosis which requires a nasopharyngeal swab to be obtained.
- Individuals diagnosed with pertussis should be treated with antibiotics and avoid close contact with children less than 1 year of age and pregnant women in their third trimester.
- Proper hand washing may help prevent the spread of pertussis as well as other diseases

What is the treatment for Pertussis?

- People with pertussis may be prescribed antibiotics.
- An infected individual should stay home and avoid close contact with others until the treatment has been completed.

Who needs to be protected?

- Pregnant women in their third trimester and infants less than 1 year of age
- Pertussis is most severe among infants less than one year of age.
- Young infants may experience complications such as vomiting after a coughing spell, weight loss, breathing problems, pneumonia, convulsions, brain damage and in rare cases death.

People who have had pertussis infection should continue to receive pertussis containing vaccine. The length of protection after pertussis infection is unknown and diagnosis can be difficult to confirm without proper testing.