



# PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH)

## WHAT IS PERTUSSIS?

Pertussis is a very contagious infection that causes a coughing illness. It is caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis* that are found in the mouth, nose, and throat of an infected person. Pertussis is also known as whooping cough.

## WHO CAN GET PERTUSSIS?

Pertussis can occur at any age. Severe illness is more common in infants and young children who either have never been vaccinated or who have not received the full series of vaccines. Many cases occur in older children and adults because protection from the vaccine lasts only 5 to 10 years after the last dose.

## WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF PERTUSSIS?

Symptoms appear between 5-21 days after exposure, usually 7-10 days.

- The illness begins with cold-like symptoms, such as a runny nose, sore throat, and mild cough.
- Within 1-2 weeks, the cough becomes more severe, and leads to coughing fits, difficulty in getting one's breath, mucus production, vomiting following coughing, and a "whooping" sound while struggling to inhale after coughing. Fever is usually absent, and people often do not appear ill between coughing fits.
- The disease may last 6-10 weeks or longer. Pertussis is most dangerous in infants less than 6 months of age as they may not cough but stop breathing, leading to hypoxia, brain damage and death.

## HOW IS PERTUSSIS SPREAD?

The bacteria are found in the nose and throat of an ill person and are spread through droplets when infected people cough, sneeze, or talk. The greatest risk of spread is during the early stage when it appears to be just a simple cold.

Without antibiotic treatment, a person is contagious for up to 3 weeks after the start of coughing fits. If treated with antibiotics, then the ill person is contagious until 5 days after treatment begins even though the cough may continue.

## HOW IS PERTUSSIS DIAGNOSED?

A swab from the back of the nose and throat is necessary for identifying the bacteria. A routine throat culture is not adequate to diagnose this disease. It may take as long as 10 days to receive the results of the test, although most test results are available within a few days.

## HOW IS PERTUSSIS TREATED?

Antibiotics, preferably azithromycin, erythromycin, and clarithromycin are used to treat the disease. During this time, the ill individual should remain at home to reduce the spread of the disease.

## HOW CAN I HELP PREVENT PERTUSSIS?

The vaccination against pertussis is included in the DTaP, DTP and Tdap vaccines. Pertussis is the "P" part of the vaccine. Children under 7 years of age should get 5 doses of the DTaP/DTP vaccine--at 2, 4, 6, and 12-15 months, and at 4-6 years of age. 7-9 year old children should get vaccinated with Tdap if they did not complete their primary series. Individuals 10 years and older should get one booster dose of Tdap if they have not previously received a Tdap. Pregnant women should be immunized during the late second or third trimester of each pregnancy to help protect their newborn infants irrespective of prior history of receiving Tdap.

### What if I was exposed to someone diagnosed with pertussis?

- Talk to your doctor, nurse, or clinic as soon as you learn that you have been exposed. You may be given antibiotics to treat your infection and make the infection less serious, especially if you start it early. Try to stay away from other people until you have completed the first 5 days of treatment (or until another diagnosis for the cough is given and you know that you are not contagious).

### What should I do if I think someone in my family has pertussis?

- If you think you or one of your family members has whooping cough, call your doctor, nurse, or clinic and ask to be evaluated for whooping cough. Anyone that might have whooping cough should stay away from other people until the illness is treated (or another diagnosis for the cough proves it's not contagious).

### When can my child return to school/return to childcare?

If your child has been diagnosed with whooping cough by their doctor:

- Tell the school that a doctor diagnosed your child with whooping cough.
- School officials may request that you keep your child home from school and activities, such as sports or play groups, until your child has been on appropriate antibiotics for five days to treat whooping cough.
- Ask your child's doctor for a note that states your child has whooping cough.

### If your child's doctor says your child does NOT have whooping cough:

- Ask for a note from the doctor telling the school that your child's cough is NOT whooping cough and that your child can return to school and other activities at any time.

Pertussis is a Washington State reportable disease and must be reported to your local health department in Lewis County, contact Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response at 360-740-1223 during business hours or 360-740-1105 after hours and ask to speak with the health officer.



## DOES MY CHILD NEED TO STAY HOME FROM CHILDCARE/SCHOOL?

**YOUR CHILD SHOULD NOT ATTEND CHILDCARE/SCHOOL IF ONE OF THE FOLLOWING APPLIES:**

- They have been diagnosed with pertussis and have not yet completed antibiotic treatment.
- They do not feel well enough to participate in classroom activities.