



FACT SHEET

What is pertussis?

Pertussis is caused by bacteria. You may know pertussis by its other name — whooping cough. Whooping cough is an infection of the respiratory system. The classic sign of pertussis is a “whooping” sound made at the end of an episode of violent coughing. This is what gives pertussis its common name of “whooping cough.” Whooping cough often resolves in three to six months, even with treatment.

How pertussis is spread

Pertussis spreads through direct contact with nose and throat mucus and droplets from coughing or sneezing.

Who is at risk

Whooping cough can infect any age group. However:

- It often occurs in preschool or school-age children.
- Whooping cough is a particular concern for pregnant women and for infants. It can be serious — even fatal — for infants.

Signs and symptoms

- Whooping cough usually starts with cold-like symptoms. It then causes fits of coughing so bad that it can be hard to catch your breath.
- The fits of uncontrollable coughing are often so bad that it causes vomiting.

Seeking care and treatment

- Call your doctor if you are pregnant and have symptoms of pertussis, or if your infant child does.
- Providers can often treat pertussis with antibiotics. Antibiotics may also help prevent it among pertussis-exposed people.

Prevention

- If you have signs of pertussis, stay home from work, school and other public places until you have consulted your health care provider.
- The best way you can prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated!
- There is a routine childhood vaccine to prevent whooping cough. It reduces the likelihood of infection in infants and children.
- Babies and preschool children should get a total of five doses of DTaP vaccine for maximum protection. It protects against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis. Children receive doses at ages 2, 4 and 6 months, at 15 through 18 months, and again at 4 through 6 years.
- Preteens should get a booster dose of Tdap at 11 or 12 years old. Tdap vaccine is a booster shot that helps protect your preteen or teen from the same diseases as the DTaP shots do for little kids.

- Teens or adults who didn't get Tdap vaccine as a preteen should get one dose.
- Getting Tdap is especially important for pregnant women during the third trimester of each pregnancy. This allows mom to make antibodies, which she passes to the baby across the placenta. This protects baby from the moment of birth.



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