

## Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

### What is it?

Whooping cough is a vaccine preventable disease of the respiratory tract caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.

### What are the symptoms?

Whooping cough starts like a cold with a runny nose, sneezing and an irritating cough that gradually (over one to two weeks) becomes more frequent and severe. The cough may end in gagging, vomiting or difficulty breathing. In children, the coughing is often followed by a loud “whoop” when breathing in. Infants under six months of age and people who have been vaccinated often do not have the “whoop” or the coughing fits. Vaccinated people who become ill with whooping cough usually have milder illness than those who have not been vaccinated.

### Who is at risk?

Children, especially babies, are at high risk for serious infections, but pertussis can also affect individuals of any age.

### When do symptoms start?

After coming in contact with the bacteria, symptoms can start in nine to 10 days (range six to 20 days).

### When is it contagious?

Pertussis is very contagious for up to three weeks after symptoms begin.

### How does it spread?

It is spread easily from person to person through the air in droplets that are produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Pertussis is less commonly spread through contact with articles freshly soiled with droplets from the nose and throat of infected people.

### How is it treated?

Antibiotic treatment for 10 days will help to kill the bacteria in the nose and throat that cause the disease. Unless started very early in the illness, antibiotics will not have any effect on how long the cough and other symptoms last, but will help lessen the chance of spreading the disease.

### How can the spread of Pertussis be reduced?

Children under seven years of age should be vaccinated against pertussis. Vaccination can provide 60 to 80 per cent effectiveness against the disease or reduce the severity of it. Washing hands frequently and covering your mouth when you cough and sneeze can help reduce the spread of the disease. Do not share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys, or anything that has been in contact with saliva, or droplets from the nose or throat of an infected person. Put soiled tissues in the garbage. Wash hands after touching articles soiled with droplets from the mouth or nose.

### What do I do if I get sick with Pertussis?

See your doctor for treatment. Stay home if you are ill, and away from others including your family until your symptoms are gone. It is sometimes recommended that people in close contact with a person with pertussis to take antibiotics, especially if they may infect others, particularly babies. If so, it is important to take them as directed.