



# Pertussis Fact Sheet

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is pertussis?

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a disease that is easily spread to others. The illness is caused by the bacteria, *Bordetella pertussis*.

### Who gets pertussis?

People of any age can get pertussis but infants younger than 12 months of age have the highest chance of severe, life-threatening problems and death.

### How do you get it?

Pertussis is spread from person-to-person. People with pertussis usually spread the disease by coughing or sneezing. Those in close contact then breathe in the pertussis bacteria.

### What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Pertussis usually begins with cold-like symptoms, including a runny nose, low-grade fever, and a mild, occasional cough. After 1 to 2 weeks, severe coughing can begin that continues for weeks. Pertussis can cause periods of forceful and rapid coughing, until the air is forced from the lungs. When a breath is finally taken a loud “whooping” sound can be heard. These extreme coughing fits can cause vomiting and exhaustion. The infection is generally milder in teens and adults, especially those who have been vaccinated.

Infants younger than 12 months of age who have not completed the recommended number of pertussis vaccine doses often have the most severe symptoms. In infants, the cough can be minimal or may not even be present. Infants may develop long pauses in breathing, also known as apnea. More than half of infants younger than 1 year of age who have pertussis must be hospitalized.

### When do the symptoms start?

Symptoms of pertussis usually develop within 7 – 10 days after being exposed, but sometimes may develop as short as 4 days or as long as 3 weeks after contact with an infected person.

### How long is a person with pertussis contagious?

Persons with pertussis are infectious for 3 weeks after the start of the cough. This infectious period may be shorter when a doctor prescribes appropriate treatment.

What is the treatment for pertussis?

Early treatment with antibiotics is very important. If treatment is started early, before severe coughing occurs, the symptoms may be less. If the patient is diagnosed late, antibiotics will not change the course of the illness. Household and other close contacts of a person with pertussis should also be treated with antibiotics to keep from getting or spreading the disease to others. Hospital care may be necessary, especially for young infants.

Should a person with pertussis stay home from school or work?

**Yes.** A person with pertussis should stay home for 5 days after starting appropriate antibiotic treatment. A person with pertussis who is not taking antibiotics should stay home from school or work for 3 weeks after the start of the cough.

Can pertussis be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated. All infants and children should be routinely vaccinated with DTaP vaccine. Preteens, teenagers, and adults who received DTaP vaccines in childhood should receive one Tdap booster dose. Adults who have close contact with infants should receive a dose of Tdap vaccine.

**Pertussis vaccination is especially important for anyone who has close contact with infants less than 12 months of age, including parents, siblings, relatives, and caregivers (for example, grandparents and child care providers).**

Keep infants and others at high risk for pertussis complications away from people who have cold symptoms or are coughing.

Where can I get the pertussis vaccine?

Ask your healthcare provider or doctor.

Adults may refer to the list of pharmacies offering Tdap at:

[http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/files/2013/07/IMM\\_Adult\\_Resource\\_List.pdf](http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/files/2013/07/IMM_Adult_Resource_List.pdf)

For Additional Information:

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Vaccines and Immunizations website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/default.htm>

or the CDC's website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/>