

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Fact Sheet



What is pertussis?

Pertussis (Whooping cough) is a highly contagious respiratory tract infection caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.

Symptoms

Early symptoms include:

- **Low-grade fever**
- **Runny nose**
- Occasional cough
- This progresses 1-2 weeks later, into a **severe hacking cough** followed by a high-pitched “whoop” sound
- Vomiting during or after coughing
- **Babies and young children may not cough but have difficulty breathing**
- In between coughing episodes, people may feel and appear healthy. The cough typically lasts one month or longer

Prevention

Vaccination with Tdap does not guarantee long-term protection. **Vaccination is effective in preventing severe disease and hospitalization.** Expectant mothers should receive a dose of Tdap during every pregnancy. **Talk to your doctor about vaccination.**

How is it spread?

The bacteria spreads through close contact or respiratory droplets from a person with pertussis. **A person with pertussis is contagious during the first 1-2 weeks of illness, until 3 weeks after cough onset. Receiving 5 days of antibiotic treatment will end the contagious period.**

Treatment

Antibiotics are used to treat pertussis. A person with pertussis should remain home until five days of treatment have been completed. **Household contacts of a person with pertussis may also be eligible for antibiotic treatment to prevent disease.** Babies younger than age one are at highest risk for complications and hospitalization.

