

WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS)

What is Whooping Cough?

Whooping Cough (Pertussis) is a very contagious disease that is spread through the air by coughing. It is caused by the bacteria, Bordetella Pertussis. Whooping cough is usually mild in older children and adults, but often causes serious problems in children under the age of one.

How is Whooping Cough spread?

Whooping Cough is an airborne illness. When people with Whooping Cough sneeze or cough, tiny droplets of fluid containing the bacteria enter the air. Others can inhale the droplets or get them on their hands or other objects that come into contact with these droplets.

What are the symptoms of Whooping Cough?

Whooping Cough symptoms appear 5-21 days after infection. Usually only close contacts of students with whooping cough become infected. The first stage of whooping cough begins with cold-like symptoms (sneezing and runny nose) and a cough that becomes much worse over 1-2 weeks. In the second stage, the cough usually occurs in strong uncontrolled coughing spasms (coughing fits). In young children, this is often followed by a whooping noise, as they try to catch their breath. After coughing, a person may have difficulty catching their breath, vomit, or become blue in the face from lack of air. Between coughing spells, the person may appear well. There is usually no fever. The cough is often worse at night and cough medicines usually do not help stop the cough. This stage can last 6 weeks or longer. Adults, teens, and vaccinated children often have milder symptoms that mimic bronchitis or asthma.

How is Whooping Cough treated?

Although Whooping Cough (Pertussis) vaccine is available, it cannot be given after the age of 7 years. Vaccine prevention begins to fade in older children and adults. Please consider the following health recommendations:

- If you or your child has had close contact with someone diagnosed with Whooping Cough, discuss antibiotic therapy with your child's physician to prevent illness
- If your child comes down with cold symptoms that include a cough, talk to your child's physician without delay. Tell him/her if they have been exposed to Whooping Cough. Report possible Whooping Cough infections to the local health department
- Infants under one year of age, and particularly under 6 months, are most likely to experience severe illness if they develop Whooping Cough. When possible, young infants should be kept away from anyone with a cough.
- If you have children less than 7 years of age who have not been completely vaccinated for Whooping Cough (Pertussis), particularly infants under one year, talk to your physician about the benefits of vaccination. Pertussis given along with diphtheria and tetanus vaccine in the same shot (DTaP) is given at 2, 4, 6, and 15 months of age, and again when a child enters school.

How serious is Whooping Cough?

Pertussis treatment procedures have made complications from Whooping Cough less likely than in the past. Complications such as pneumonia, pulmonary hypertension, ear infections, seizures, weight loss, dehydration, and/or other exertion-related injuries can result from severe coughing.

Where can I get more information?

Your family doctor, school nurse, or the local health department are excellent sources for information on all communicable diseases.