

quick facts

About... *Pertussis (Whooping cough)*

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, also called *whooping cough*, is a contagious illness caused by bacteria. It can occur at any age, but is usually more severe in infants. Adults and teenagers, who often have milder and undiagnosed symptoms, can give the disease to infants and other persons who are not immune.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Pertussis can be divided into 3 stages:

1. During the first stage, symptoms are similar to having a cold. There may be a slight fever, sneezing, runny nose, dry cough, loss of appetite, and irritability.
2. During the second stage (about 1 to 2 weeks later), the cough becomes more intense. There may be short, intense coughing spells followed by a long gasp for air (this is when the "whoop" is heard). The face may turn blue, nose may bleed, and vomiting may occur following a coughing spell.
3. During the third stage, the cough is less intense and less frequent, and appetite begins to increase. Eventually, maybe several months later, the cough stops.

How is pertussis spread?

Usually, it is spread by contact with an infected person's nose or throat secretions. This can happen by touching an infected person's nose or throat drainage, or it can be spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

How is pertussis treated?

Antibiotics are given to make the illness less contagious, but do not reduce the symptoms unless given very early in illness.

How can pertussis be prevented?

Be sure that children are up to date on their shots, especially the diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (DTaP) series. A booster dose of pertussis containing vaccine (Tdap) is available for persons 10-64 years of age. Tdap is now the recommended vaccine for use as a booster dose, replacing Td (tetanus-diphtheria) which had been used for many years.

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