

Protect your Family from Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

1. What is Pertussis?

Pertussis is a contagious disease that can spread when a person coughs or sneezes. Unvaccinated people, especially babies, can “whoop” when taking a breath in between coughing fits, so the disease is commonly referred to as “whooping cough.” Pertussis can cause serious illness, leading to hospital stays and even death, especially in infants less than 6 months old.

2. What are the symptoms?

Pertussis (whooping cough) usually starts with mild cold-like symptoms—runny or stuffy nose, watery eyes, sneezing, and dry cough. After a week or two, people start having sudden coughing attacks that are hard to stop. These coughing attacks can lead to vomiting, problems breathing, and feeling very tired. Unvaccinated children and infants have a severe cough, often breathing with a loud “whooping” sound. Many teens and adults don’t have the “whoop” sound. A long-lasting severe cough may be an adult’s only symptom.

Some infants may experience only mild symptoms such as congestion and a runny nose. However, many may struggle to breath, or even temporarily stop breathing (apnea). They may also become very tired and have a poor appetite. Symptoms can get worse very quickly so it’s important to seek treatment early.

Call your doctor or go to the nearest emergency room right away if the coughing spells cause your child to:

- Vomit with difficulty drinking and keeping hydrated
- Have difficulty breathing or turn blue
- Become lethargic and stop interacting with family members
- Infants less than 4 months with whooping cough should always seek additional medical care

3. What is the treatment?

Doctors may give antibiotics to treat the disease. Young infants are often treated in a hospital because they’re more likely to have serious health problems. It is important to treat pertussis early. If you think that you or your loved one may have it, contact your doctor right away.

4. How do you prevent it?

The best way to prevent it is to get a vaccine. The recommended vaccine for children is DTaP. This safe and effective vaccine protects against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis. For the best protection, children should get a DTaP vaccine at 2, 4, and 6 months; between 15-18 months of age; and before entering kindergarten at 4-6 years of age.

Pre-teens (11-12 years of age) and adults, including pregnant women in their third trimester, should get the Tdap booster shot because vaccine protection goes away over time. Parents and others who care for young infants should get a Tdap shot to protect themselves and the infant.



Related Health Problems:

For Infants

(mainly under 6 months of age)

- Ear infections
- Pneumonia
- Dehydration
- Seizures
- Brain damage
- Slow or stopped breathing

For Adults

- Hernias in the stomach
- Broken or damaged ribs
- Broken blood vessels of the skin or eyes

Prevention Tips:

- Get vaccinated
- Wear a well-fitted medical grade mask over your nose and mouth
- Cover your cough and sneeze
- Wash your hands often
- Stay home if you’re sick

If you don’t have health insurance or a regular doctor, dial **2-1-1** for a list of low or no cost immunization clinics.