

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Fact Sheet

What Everyone Should Know About Pertussis

- Pertussis is a highly contagious bacterial infection that causes uncontrollable and violent coughing. This coughing lasts for several weeks or even months.
- Pertussis begins with cold-like symptoms such as sneezing, runny nose, low-grade fever and mild cough. Within two weeks, this cough becomes more severe and is characterized by frequent, rapid coughs followed by a high pitched whoop. A thick, clear mucus may be discharged from the nose.
- Pertussis can occur at any age. People at high risk for severe illness include children who are too young to be vaccinated and those who have not completed their vaccination series.
- Major complications of pertussis may include pneumonia, middle ear infection, loss of appetite, sleep disturbance, dehydration, seizures and death.
- Pertussis is primarily spread from person to person by direct contact with mucus or droplets from the nose and throat of infected individuals.
- If untreated, a person with pertussis is contagious (able to infect others) from the first day of symptoms until three weeks after the start of severe cough.
- Treatment of pertussis with appropriate antibiotics will shorten the contagious period to five days after the start of treatment.

Preventing Pertussis

- The single most effective way to prevent pertussis is to maintain high immunization levels within the community.
- Adults in close contact with an infant under the age of 12 months should receive a dose of Tdap in order to provide protection to these babies who are unable to be vaccinated.
- Adults between the ages of 19 and 64 who have not previously received a dose of Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis), should replace their next tetanus booster with a single dose of Tdap.



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