

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Fact Sheet

Pertussis is a disease of the lungs and throat caused by a bacterium

Bordetella pertussis is the bacterium that causes pertussis. The bacterium is easily spread from person to person.

Pertussis is spread by close contact with someone who has the infection

Pertussis is spread to others by infected secretions from the nose and throat, beginning from just before onset of symptoms until up to 3 weeks after symptoms start. Treatment with antibiotics shortens the contagious period to about 5 days. Anyone can get pertussis who has not had pertussis or pertussis vaccine. Sixty percent of cases occur in children less than 5 years old. Older children and adults can carry the bacterium and spread it, but have only mild symptoms.

Symptoms to look for include:

- Low fever
- Runny nose
- Cough that is mild at first, then severe with times of deep rapid coughing and a "whoop"; cough often worse at night
- Vomiting after coughing

Symptoms start within 7 to 20 days after exposure. Symptoms may last for 1 to 2 months or longer.

Although most people recover, complications of pertussis can be severe

Pertussis can be a very serious illness in children less than one year old, especially in premature babies or babies with lung disease. Pneumonia, seizures, brain problems, even death can occur.

See a doctor for treatment

Pertussis is usually treated with an antibiotic. Some children may need to be hospitalized. People in close contact with children or adults who have pertussis usually need an antibiotic and may need vaccine.

Pertussis disease can be prevented with pertussis vaccine

Every child should get pertussis vaccine at 2, 4, 6, and 15 to 18 months of age, and another dose at 4 to 6 years old. This vaccine is given as one shot to protect against pertussis, tetanus, and diphtheria (DTaP). The vaccine is not given to older children and

adults.