



Infectious Disease Fact Sheet

Pertussis

Pertussis, also known as Whooping Cough, is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.

Symptoms

Symptoms usually appear 7-10 days after exposure to the bacteria, including:

- Early symptoms resemble the common cold, including sneezing, runny nose, mild fever and cough.
- Within one to two weeks:
 - More severe cough or fits of numerous rapid coughs
 - Coughing followed by a high-pitched “whoop”
 - Coughing so hard that the ill person gags or vomits
- These episodes may recur for one to two months and are more frequent at night.
- Some people including young infants, immunized school children, adolescents, and adults, may not have these typical coughing spells. Infants may have pauses in breathing more than coughing.

Transmission

- Pertussis is primarily spread by direct contact with fluids from the nose and throat of infected people.
- Droplets from the nose or throat can be released into the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. People within 3 feet of an ill person can breathe in these droplets and be infected.
- The greatest risk for spread is during the early stages of illness when symptoms resemble the common cold.
- A person can transmit pertussis from the time they begin to show symptoms until three weeks after coughing begins. This time can be reduced to five days after appropriate antibiotic therapy begins.
- A person diagnosed with pertussis **MUST** be excluded from school and/or child care center while they can still transmit pertussis.

Treatment

- A person infected with pertussis should receive an appropriate antibiotic to reduce their ability to spread the illness. Azithromycin, erythromycin, and clarithromycin are the preferred medicines for pertussis, although your physician may prescribe another antibiotic if you cannot take one of these medications.
- Household members and close contacts of a person diagnosed with pertussis will also need to take antibiotics to prevent them from getting pertussis. A close contact is anyone who has had face-to-face contact or shared a confined space for a prolonged period of time with a symptomatic person. Close contacts also include persons who have direct contact with fluids from the mouth, nose, and throat of a sick person.
- In addition to antimicrobials, household and close contacts who have had at least four doses of pertussis vaccine should receive a booster dose (DTaP) unless a dose has been given within the past three years. Ask your physician about what vaccines are available to you.

Additional Information

- Young infants are at the greatest risk for complications, which include mild complications like ear infections, loss of appetite, and dehydration, or serious complications like pneumonia, seizures, brain disorders, and death.
- The best way to prevent pertussis is to ensure that your entire family gets their vaccines on time. Having an up to date pertussis vaccine greatly reduces the chances of getting pertussis, and makes the infection milder if it does occur.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.