

PERTUSSIS

Pertussis (whooping cough) is a serious, sometimes fatal, respiratory infection, especially for children. Adults are often the main source of pertussis. The disease usually begins with cold-like symptoms including runny nose, congestion, sneezing, mild cough and fever. After one to two weeks, the disease progresses to severe coughing spells with a loud "whooping" sound while inhaling. Coughing spells may end in vomiting.

What are the complications of pertussis?

Pertussis results in difficulty breathing, fainting, difficulty sleeping, rib fractures, and pneumonia. Infants can develop pneumonia, seizures, inflammation of the brain, permanent brain damage, and possibly death.

How is the disease spread?

Pertussis spreads very easily from an infected person who has close, direct contact with others through coughing and sneezing. The disease spreads most during the first two weeks of the illness until either about three weeks after the start of the severe coughing stage or after five days of antibiotic treatment. Symptoms begin seven to 21 days after contact with an infected person.

What should you do if you have pertussis?

- To prevent its spread, stay home. Avoid contact with pregnant women in their last trimester and infants (less than 12 months of age) until you have taken antibiotics for at least five days.
- Cover your nose and mouth with your upper arm or a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Wash your hands well afterwards using soap and water.
- Close contacts should ensure that their immunizations are up to date. Contact your health care provider.

How is pertussis treated?

Antibiotics are prescribed for people diagnosed with pertussis. Antibiotics may also be given to close contacts, including people living in the same house, infants less than one year of age or a pregnant woman in their third trimester. Ensure that you complete the treatment prescribed for you.

How is pertussis prevented?

- Get immunized. Immunization for pertussis provides the best protection against the disease.