

Pertussis (whooping cough)

What is pertussis?

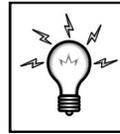
Pertussis, commonly known as “whooping cough,” is an illness caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis* that affects the respiratory tract (nose, throat and lungs).

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

- Symptoms of pertussis usually develop within 7-10 days after exposure, but can take up to 3 weeks.
- Pertussis usually begins with **cold-like symptoms**, which can include a **mild, irritating cough, runny nose, and low-grade fever**.
- Within 1-2 weeks, the cough becomes more severe and often occurs as **coughing fits**, which may be more frequent at night.
- Severe coughing fits may be followed by a **high-pitched “whoop” sound, vomiting, breathlessness, or a change in the color of the face or lips**. Adults and children may not get the “whoop” but a severe cough can still signify pertussis.
- The coughing fits can last for 2-12 weeks, gradually becoming less frequent.

How do I get pertussis?

Pertussis is spread by breathing in the droplets of an infected person’s cough or sneeze. Usually people become infected when they are in close contact (an arm’s length away) for an extended period of time (one or more hours) or live in the same household with an infected person.



Health Tip

Hygienic practices can help prevent the spread of pertussis:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Put used tissues in the trash can.
- Never sneeze into your hand, sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow if a tissue is unavailable.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.

Is pertussis serious?

- Pertussis can be a severe illness, especially for infants under one year of age.
- Complications may include ear infections, pneumonia, hernias, lung collapse, seizures and brain damage. Some severe cases can lead to death.



How long is someone with pertussis contagious?

A person with pertussis is contagious until they have completed **5 full days of an appropriate antibiotic** or until they have been **coughing for 3 full weeks**.

(over)

What is the treatment for pertussis?

- If you think you may have pertussis, see a health care provider immediately for testing and treatment. If you work with small children or in a health care setting, be sure the health care provider tests you for pertussis. Pertussis is diagnosed by testing nasal secretions collected from a swab or a syringe filled with saline.
- If you have been exposed to pertussis **and a cough has already started**, see a health care provider and stay home. **Do not** go to school, child care, work, church or other public place until you have taken the recommended antibiotic treatment for **5 full days**.
- Pertussis is treated with antibiotics. Treatment may make your symptoms less severe if started before severe coughing fits begin. Current information on effective antibiotics is available to you and your doctor through the health department.

**For information on
Tri-County Health Department's
immunization clinics
please call 303-451-0123**

How do I prevent pertussis?

- Immunization is the most effective way to prevent pertussis.
- One dose of Tdap vaccine is recommended for all adolescents and adults. **This is especially important for those who are in contact with infants under one year of age.**
- All children should be immunized with five doses of diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis (DTaP) vaccine. This vaccine is given at two, four, six, and 15-18 months of age, and between four and six years of age.
- Children under 7 years of age not fully immunized against pertussis should receive the DTaP vaccines they need.
- All adolescents should receive a dose of Tdap vaccine at 11-12 years of age. This dose is now required for students entering 6th to 12th grades.
- If you live with or are often in close contact with a person who has pertussis, you should receive antibiotic treatment even if you do not have symptoms or have been immunized against pertussis. If you have not been immunized with Tdap previously, you should receive both antibiotics and vaccine.



Why does the health department investigate pertussis?

- It is the responsibility of the local health department to investigate pertussis in the community. The health department keeps track of how many people are getting the disease and works to limit the number of people exposed.
- The health department works with someone who has pertussis to identify other people at risk of infection and make recommendations to prevent them from getting ill.
- Schools, child care centers, and workplaces also work closely with the health department to limit the spread of pertussis in their facilities.
- The health department works hard to identify individuals at an increased risk of infection or increased risk of complications from infection with pertussis and prevent them from getting ill.

