

Fact Sheet

Pertussis

What is Pertussis disease?

Pertussis (also called whooping cough) is a disease of the lungs and throat caused by bacteria.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Symptoms of Pertussis may include:

- A low fever.
- A cough, mild at first and then becoming a deep rapid cough followed by a “whoop.”
- Vomiting after coughing.
- Coughing that is worse at night.

These symptoms usually start 7-10 days after a person has been exposed and can last for 6-10 weeks. Although most people will recover from Pertussis, some people, especially infants, can become very ill. Pneumonia and seizures can occur.

How is it spread?

The bacteria that causes Pertussis spreads very easily from person-to-person by close contact with drops of fluid from the nose and throat of someone who has the disease. Pertussis can be spread to others from the time someone catches the disease (even before they start coughing) until 3 weeks after their symptoms started, or until they have been taking appropriate treatment for 5 days.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can get Pertussis, though the most severe cases occur in children less than one year of age. Older children, adolescents and adults can catch and spread Pertussis, but may have milder symptoms.

What is the treatment?

Antibiotics can be used to treat Pertussis; early diagnosis and treatment is important. Your health care provider will decide which antibiotic is best to treat the disease.

Some older children and adults who have had contact with the individual with Pertussis may also need to take an antibiotic. Your health care provider will help determine if this is the case.

Children who have not completed their recommended pertussis immunization will need the vaccine.

How can Pertussis be prevented?

- Vaccination is very important for the prevention for Pertussis. Ensure that pertussis vaccines for you and your family are up to date.
- Hand washing is the best way to prevent all types of infection. Hand washing, especially after coughing and sneezing, and before and after caring for a sick person, will help prevent the spread of germs.
- Avoid sharing food, drinks, cigarettes or eating utensils, and toothbrushes.
- Speak to your health care provider if anyone in your household has a cough that lasts longer than one week.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your Community Health Centre or Public Health.