

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

What is pertussis? It is a serious respiratory infection, especially in infants. It is rare today because most children are immunized against it. It can last for six to 10 weeks with:

- Runny nose
- Persistent coughing fits followed by a gasp ("whoop") to breathe may lead to vomiting

Pertussis can also cause pneumonia, seizures, brain damage, respiratory failure, and death.

How is pertussis spread? It spreads by:

- Being in a room together, coughing, and sneezing
- Touching mucus from the nose or saliva
- Kissing on the lips
- Sharing food, eating utensils, and mouthed toys

When is pertussis contagious?

- Mostly during the runny nose phase but remains contagious for up to three weeks. No longer contagious after five days of effective antibiotic treatment.
- After exposure, it can take one to three weeks to get sick.

Children who completed pertussis immunizations usually don't catch it.

How do I know if my child has pertussis? If your child has the symptoms, see your doctor immediately. Pertussis is diagnosed by the symptoms and cultures of the nose and throat.

What should I do if my child has pertussis?

Treatment: Follow the treatment prescribed by your doctor:

- Antibiotic medication.
- For infants with severe illness, hospitalization, oxygen, special feeding, and close monitoring of Breathing are necessary

Children at home or school who were recently exposed to pertussis can get antibiotic medication and immunization boosters to help prevent the illness.

Keep your child home: until five days after the start of antibiotic treatment and until he or she feels well enough to participate. Notify your Head Start program immediately.

To limit the spread:

- Immunize children against pertussis at two, four, six, and 12 to 15 months, and four to six years.
- Report cases of pertussis to the local health department.
- Don't expose infants and children who have not been immunized.
- Wipe noses with clean tissues, throw them away, and wash your hands.
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow and away from people.
- Don't share food, pacifiers, bottles, or toothbrushes. Wash eating utensils, drinking cups, and mouthed toys well between uses.
- Don't kiss children on the mouth.
- Open windows indoors and maximize outdoor play.