



Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

FACT SHEET 98-001-0312

What is it? Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. Pertussis usually starts with cold-like symptoms, a runny nose, a mild cough, and a low-grade fever. After 1 to 2 weeks, severe coughing can begin. Bursts of coughing may end with an inspiratory "whoop" sound as the individual gasps for breath. This severe coughing can cause vomiting and exhaustion and can last for weeks. In infants, the cough can be minimal or absent. Infants younger than 6 months of age may not have the strength to have a whoop, but they can have bursts of coughing. Infants may gag, gasp or have a symptom known as "apnea," which is a pause in breathing. Pertussis is most dangerous for babies. More than half of infants younger than 1 year of age who get the disease must be hospitalized.

How can you prevent pertussis? The best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated. The recommended pertussis vaccine for infants and children is called DtaP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis) and the series of shots is completed by the time a child enters school. Vaccine protection for pertussis, tetanus and diphtheria fades with time but adults can protect themselves and the children they are in close contact with by getting a booster vaccine. Adolescents and adults up to age 64 should receive the one-time booster for protection against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (Tdap), preferably at age 11-12. Pregnant women in need of the booster should receive it late in the second trimester or during the third trimester. **Adolescents and adults of any age (including those 65 and older), who have close contact with an infant under 12 months old, should be vaccinated with Tdap as soon as possible.**

How is pertussis treated? Pertussis is generally treated with antibiotics and early treatment is very important. Treatment may make the infection less severe if it is started early, before coughing fits begin. Treatment can also help prevent the spread of the disease. Treatment begun after 3 weeks of illness is unlikely to help because even though symptoms persist, the bacteria are gone from one's body. Children, childcare workers, and healthcare workers with suspected or confirmed pertussis should stay home from work, school, or daycare for at least the first 5 days of antibiotic treatment.

Summary: Pertussis (whooping cough) is a disease that can affect infants, children, and adults; however, the disease is most severe in children and can be fatal in infants. Protection from childhood immunization does not last into adulthood. Therefore, all adolescents and adults should protect themselves by receiving a one-time pertussis booster vaccine (Tdap), especially those who have close contact with an infant less than 1 year old.

Reference: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/ACIP/

Date: March 2012

For more information talk to your health care provider.