

Prevention and Control Measures Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

What is pertussis?

- Pertussis is also called whooping cough. It is a serious lung infection caused by bacteria. It is also very contagious and causes coughing fits. Whooping cough is most serious for babies with very small airways. It can lead to death.

How does Pertussis spread?

- The bacteria that cause whooping cough spread easily from **person to person** through the air. When a person with whooping cough sneezes or coughs, they release small particles with the bacteria in them. Other people can then breathe in the bacteria.
- These bacteria can spread when people spend a lot of time together or share breathing space.
- People can spread the bacteria from the start of symptoms and for at least 2 weeks after coughing begins.

What are the symptoms?

- Symptoms usually appear about 7 to 10 days after exposure. But symptoms can appear from 4 to 21 days after a person is infected. It is rare but it can take up to 6 weeks to develop symptoms. Some people have milder symptoms, especially if they have been vaccinated.
- Symptoms appear in 3 stages:
 - Stage one lasts 1-2 weeks: runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever, mild occasional cough. It may look like the common cold, but the cough begins to get worse.
 - Stage two can last 1-2 months: Cough becomes more severe. There are coughing fits that can be followed by a high-pitched whoop. The whoop means the person is trying to catch their breath. Sometimes a person will turn blue and vomit mucus or food. They also may have brief periods when they stop breathing.
 - Stage three may last weeks to months: Recovery phase is when a person slowly gets better. Coughing fits can come back if the person gets another respiratory illness.

Where can I find more information?

- Ask your doctor
- Call the Alabama Department of Public Health, Immunization Division, at 1-800-469-4599
- Go to cdc.gov and type Whooping Cough (Pertussis) in the SEARCH box.



Alabama Department of Public Health

Immunization Division, 201 Monroe St, Montgomery, AL 36104

1-800-469-4599 <https://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/immunization/measles.html> 03/09/26

Who is most likely to develop Pertussis?

- Age and underlying medical conditions can increase someone's risk for getting a severe case of whooping cough. It's especially important to prevent these people from getting sick.
- Babies younger than 1 year old are at greatest risk for getting whooping cough and having severe complications from it.
- Pregnant women
- Immunocompromised individuals
- People with asthma, COPD, or chronic lung diseases.
- People who have not received the DTaP or Tdap vaccines.

Is there a vaccine against Pertussis?

- There are two types of combination vaccines that protect against whooping cough: DTaP and Tdap.
- Babies and children younger than 7 years old receive DTaP, while older children and adults receive Tdap.
- The recommended pertussis vaccine for infants and children is called DTaP. This protects children against 3 diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, and whooping cough (pertussis).
- DTaP shots are given at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. To maintain protection, boosters are also given at 15 through 18 months and 4 through 6 years of age.
- 7- to 10-year-olds who are not fully immunized with DTaP, should get a Tdap vaccine which protects against diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough (pertussis).
- Preteens need one shot of Tdap between the ages of 11 and 12 years to boost their immunity. CDC recommends that teens who didn't get Tdap as a preteen should get one shot the next time, they visit their healthcare provider.
- All adults 19 and older who have not received a Tdap vaccine, need a booster shot.
- Adults should receive a tetanus and diphtheria (Td) booster every 10 years. They should also substitute a Tdap vaccine for one of the boosters. The Tdap can be given earlier than the 10-year spacing.
- Pregnant women should receive Tdap in the third trimester of every pregnancy to pass immunity to their newborn until the baby is old enough to begin shots at 2 months of age.

Prevention and Control Measures:

- Antibiotics can prevent and treat whooping cough. Recommended antibiotics include azithromycin, erythromycin and clarithromycin. Trimethoprim sulfamethoxazole can also be used.
- Initiate control measures *within 3 days of initial case notification*
- Ensure cases have received antimicrobial treatment to help limit spread of the disease to others and are excluded and isolated from group activity settings (e.g. schools, day-care)



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- centers, workplace, camps, etc.) until they have received at least 5 days of an appropriate course of antibiotics for pertussis
- Conduct surveillance for secondary cases and contacts.
 - Make sure appropriate specimens are taken
 - If necessary, a letter may be sent out to notify close contacts
 - Determine period of communicability (one week before to two weeks after cough onset)
 - Identify exposed/ high risk close contacts, including household contacts, childcare contacts, etc.
 - High risk contact definition (contacts at highest risk of severe disease or transmitting disease to others at high risk)
 - Infants <1 year of age
 - Pregnant women
 - Caregivers & household contact of infants (e.g., family members, friends, or babysitters who spend time caring for an infant)
 - All those attending or working in a childcare setting (i.e. same room)
 - Healthcare workers who care for infants < year of age or pregnant/postpartum women
 - Unimmunized/under immunized children and
 - Immunocompromised people
 - Refer contacts for prophylaxis to their primary care physician
 - Vaccine is not post-exposure prophylaxis but encourage all household and close contacts to be up-to-date on their pertussis vaccinations.
 - Provide education that includes basic information about the disease:
 - Incubation period (when to expect illness to appear after exposure)
 - Symptoms of disease
 - Precautions to take if symptoms develop
 - Provide information on ways to treat and prevent transmission of illness.
 - Benefits of vaccination
 - Proper antibiotic usage
 - Instruct cases on the necessary isolation.
 - Counsel contacts to watch for signs or symptoms of pertussis occurring within 21 days of exposure; should symptoms develop:
 - Their PCP should be notified, and proper specimens taken



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