

# Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

What you need to know

## What is pertussis?

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a very contagious respiratory illness caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*.

## How does it spread?

The bacteria that cause whooping cough spreads easily from **person to person** through the air.

- Small particles with the bacteria spread when a person with whooping cough sneezes or coughs.
- Bacteria can also spread when people spend a lot of time together or share breathing space.



## What are symptoms of pertussis?

Early symptoms of pertussis can look like a common cold:

- **Runny or stuffy nose**
- **Low-grade fever**
- **Mild, occasional cough**

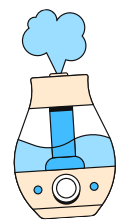
It usually takes 5 to 10 days for symptoms to appear after exposure and can sometimes take as long as 3 weeks to develop.

1-2 weeks after the first symptoms start, people may develop paroxysms, better known as **coughing fits**, that can last anywhere from 1-6 weeks, or in serious cases up to 10 weeks. They are often worse at night and sometimes can lead to vomiting.

## How do I treat my symptoms?

It is very important to treat pertussis early, before coughing fits begin. Do not take cough medicine unless a healthcare provider recommends it. There are several **antibiotics** available for treatment that may make the infection less severe. You can also:

- Use a humidifier to loosen mucus and soothe the cough
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Eat small meals to help prevent vomiting



People with serious illness or complications need care in the hospital.



# Who is the most at risk?

**Age and underlying medical conditions** can increase someone's risk for getting a severe case of pertussis or complications.

- Babies younger than 1 year old are at greatest risk.
- People with pre-existing health conditions, such as asthma, are at high risk for developing a severe infection.



# How long is a person contagious and able to spread pertussis?

People can spread the bacteria from the **start of symptoms** and for **at least 3 weeks after** coughing begins. Treatment early in the illness may shorten the amount of time someone is contagious. It is important to contact a healthcare provider if you are symptomatic for diagnosis and treatment.

Some people with mild symptoms may unknowingly spread the bacteria to others.

# How do I protect myself from pertussis?

The best way to reduce your risk and protect yourself from severe illness is by getting a **whooping cough vaccine**. A healthcare provider or health department can also decide if you need **preventive antibiotics** if you have had exposure to someone with whooping cough. Notify them of exposure as soon as possible for guidance.

Vaccination	Recommended Age	
DTaP	Young Children	• 2, 4, and 6 months
		• 15-18 months
Tdap	Preteens	11-12 years
	Pregnant Women	During 27-36th week of each pregnancy
	Adults	Anytime for those who have never received it

**For additional guidance and information, call 330-723-9688, option 2 to speak with a public health nurse.**

