

Pertussis

Your questions answered

What is pertussis?

Pertussis (whooping cough) is a very contagious disease caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. Among vaccine-preventable diseases, pertussis is one of the most commonly occurring ones in the United States. There is high vaccine coverage for children nationwide. However, protection from the childhood vaccine fades over time. Adolescents and adults need to be revaccinated, **even** if they were completely vaccinated as children. Also, pertussis vaccines are very effective, but not 100 percent effective. If pertussis is circulating in the community, there is still a chance that a fully vaccinated person can catch this very contagious disease. When you or your child develops a cold that includes a prolonged or severe cough, it may be pertussis. The best way to know is to contact your doctor.

How is pertussis transmitted?

People with pertussis usually spread the disease by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the pertussis bacteria. Many infants who get pertussis are infected by parents, older siblings or other caregivers who might not even know they have the disease.

What are the symptoms?

Pertussis can cause serious illness in infants, children and adults. The disease starts like the common cold, with runny nose or congestion, sneezing and maybe mild cough or fever. But after one to two weeks, severe coughing begins. Infants and children with the disease cough violently and rapidly, over and over, until the air is gone from their lungs and they're forced to inhale with a loud "whooping" sound.

What are the complications?

Pertussis is most severe for babies; more than half of infants less than 1 year of age who get the disease must be hospitalized. About one in five infants with pertussis get pneumonia (lung infection) and about one in 100 will have convulsions. In rare cases (one in 100), pertussis can be deadly, especially in infants.

How do you prevent pertussis and its spread?

The best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated. In the United States, the recommended pertussis vaccine for children is called DTaP. This is a safe and effective combination vaccine that protects children against three diseases: diphtheria, tetanus and Pertussis. For maximum protection against pertussis, children need five DTaP shots. The first three

What Can **YOU** Do?

shots are given at 2, 4 and 6 months of age. The fourth shot is given between 12 and 18 months of age and a fifth shot is given when a child enters school, at 4–6 years of age. Parents can also help protect infants by keeping them away as much as possible from anyone who has cold symptoms or is coughing.

Vaccine protection for pertussis, tetanus and diphtheria can fade with time.

Before 2005, the only booster vaccine available contained tetanus and diphtheria (called Td), and was recommended for adolescents and adults every 10 years.

Today there are boosters for adolescents and adults that contain Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis (called Tdap). Pre-teens going to the doctor for their regular check-up at age 11 or 12 years should get a dose of Tdap. Adults who didn't get Tdap as a pre-teen or teen should get one dose of Tdap instead of the Td booster.

Most pregnant women who were not previously vaccinated with Tdap should get one dose of Tdap postpartum before leaving the hospital or birthing center. Getting vaccinated with Tdap is especially important for families with and caregivers of new infants.

The easiest thing for adults to do is to get Tdap instead of their next regular tetanus booster (the Td shot they were supposed to get every 10 years). The dose of Tdap can be given earlier than the 10-year mark, so it's a good idea for adults to talk to a health care provider about what's best for their specific situation.

NOTE: People 65 years and older do not currently have a whooping cough booster vaccine licensed for their age group.

However, people 65 and older can talk to their health care provider to see if getting Tdap is a good decision. This discussion can include weighing the risks and benefits of receiving Tdap.

Receiving Tdap may be especially important during a community outbreak and/or if caring for an infant.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have an infection, consult with your health-care provider. This fact sheet is based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Health and Safety topic fact sheets.

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For more information on pertussis, call the Lawrence-Douglas County Health Department at **(785) 843-0721** or visit us on the web at: www.ldchealth.org