



ABOUT PERTUSSIS

What is Pertussis (also called Whooping Cough)?

- Pertussis, also called whooping cough, is a bacterial infection caused by *Bordetella pertussis*. The germ is spread when infected people cough or sneeze.
- Children with whooping cough have decreased ability to cough up respiratory secretions and develop thick, glue-like mucus in the windpipe. This causes severe coughing spells that make it difficult for them to eat, drink, or breathe.
- A child with whooping cough may suffer from coughing spells for two to three weeks or longer. Sometimes the child coughs several times before breathing in; when the child finally does breathe in there is often a loud gasp or “whooping” sound.
- The disease is most severe when it occurs early in life; it often requires hospitalization. Approximately 50 out of every 10,000 people who develop whooping cough die from the disease.

Signs and Symptoms

- Whooping cough is a bacterial respiratory disease that spreads easily and often begins with cold-like symptoms. The disease proceeds to a severe, constant cough that ends with a “whoop”, primarily in younger children. Teens and adults may not have the “whoop”. The cough is sometimes followed by vomiting. Usually there is little or no fever.

Treatment

- Children and adults who are diagnosed with whooping cough and people identified as their close contacts should be given an antibiotic to decrease passing on the disease. The antibiotic may not affect the symptoms and the cough of pertussis could continue for weeks.
- Most children, teenagers, and adults recover fully from whooping cough. However, infants younger than 6 months of age, or others with suppressed immunity or chronic respiratory problems are at greater risk of complications.
- Children with symptoms of whooping cough should be tested and all cases and contacts should get antibiotics.

How is whooping cough prevented?

- Whooping cough is most contagious before the coughing starts, so the best way to prevent it is through vaccination. The whooping cough booster vaccine for adults and teens is called Tdap. The childhood vaccine is called DTaP. Both protect against whooping cough, tetanus and diphtheria.
- All adolescents and adults should receive the new whooping cough booster vaccine.

Who should get Tdap (whooping cough booster) vaccine?

- Health officials now recommend that adolescents beginning at age 10 or 11 and adults receive a Tdap booster vaccine to protect against whooping cough instead of the previously recommended Td (tetanus-diphtheria) booster. It is especially important for those in contact with infants younger than 12 months of age.

How common is Whooping Cough?

- In 2004, adolescents 11-18 years of age and adults 19-64 years of age accounted for 34% and 27% of the cases of pertussis in the US. The true numbers are probably much higher in these age ranges because of the illness often not being recognized.

For more information see the Centers for Disease Control website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/default.htm>