

# Pertussis Fact Sheet

## “Whooping Cough”

### What is pertussis?

Pertussis, also called “whooping cough,” is a respiratory disease caused by bacteria. It often causes serious problems in babies, but is usually milder in older children and adults.

### Who gets pertussis?

Pertussis can occur at any age, but infants and young children are at the highest risk of life-threatening consequences. In Oregon, many pertussis cases occur in newborns that are too young to be immunized.

### How is pertussis spread?

- Bacteria living in the nose, mouth and throat spray into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks. Touching a tissue or sharing a cup can also spread bacteria.
- Older adolescents, adults and parents who may have a mild illness can spread the disease to infants and young children in the household.

### Symptoms of pertussis

- Runny nose, sneezing, mild fever and cough usually appear 5 to 21 days after a person is infected.
- After one or two weeks, the cough gets worse and usually starts to occur in strong fits. This may last six weeks or longer.
- In children, coughing fits are often followed by a whooping sound as they try to catch their breath. Coughing spells can be severe enough that babies have trouble eating, drinking or breathing.

### Is pertussis dangerous?

Yes, pertussis can be very dangerous for infants who have the highest risk of pertussis-related complications and death.

### How do you treat it?

Pertussis is treated with antibiotics. Once treated with the antibiotic, you or your child would need to stay home from work or school for five days.

### How is pertussis prevented?

*Immunization is the most effective way to prevent pertussis. The pertussis vaccine is safe and required for children in schools.*

### When to get the vaccine?

Mothers need the vaccine during the third trimester of **each** pregnancy. Getting the vaccine during pregnancy is more effective than getting the vaccine after birth.

Children need a series of five DTaP vaccinations starting at two months of age through kindergarten. Adolescents and adults need a booster shot to maintain immunity and prevent them from passing the whooping cough to infants.

### Is the pertussis vaccine safe?

Yes, the vaccine is safe, though there is a slight risk of problems such as pain and swelling at injection site or fever. The risk of the disease is much more serious.



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