

What is pertussis (whooping cough)?

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a contagious illness caused by bacteria. It occurs in children more often than in adults, but adults with milder, undiagnosed symptoms can transmit the disease to infants and children.

What are the symptoms of pertussis (whooping cough)?

Pertussis can be divided into three stages:

1. During the first stage, cold-like symptoms may occur and include a slight fever, sneezing, runny or stuffy nose and a mild occasional cough.
2. During the second stage (about 1 to 2 weeks later), the cough becomes more intense. There may be short, intense coughing spells followed by a long gasp for air (this is when the “whoop” is heard). The face may turn blue, and vomiting may occur during or after a coughing spell.
3. During the third stage, the cough is less intense and less frequent. Eventually, maybe many weeks later, the cough stops. However, coughing fits could return with other respiratory illnesses for several months.

Adults may have a mild form of pertussis, with prolonged cough as the only symptom.

How is pertussis spread?

Pertussis is usually spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes and others breathe in the bacteria. Although it's less common, pertussis can also be spread through contact with contaminated surfaces.

How is pertussis treated?

Antibiotics are given to make the illness less contagious, but they do not reduce the symptoms unless given very early in illness.

How can pertussis be prevented?

Be sure that children are up to date on their shots, especially the diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTaP) series. There is a pertussis-containing vaccine (Tdap) available for adolescents and older adults to boost their pertussis immunity. Please ask your doctor for the booster vaccine. Persons who have been in very close contact with a person with pertussis should take antibiotics to prevent illness.

For additional information, please visit:

[OEPS Pertussis Toolkit](#) | [CDC Whooping Cough \(Pertussis\)](#)

You may also contact the Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services at (304) 558-5358

Pertussis Recommendations:

1. If your child develops symptoms:

- Keep your child home from school and activities until whooping cough is ruled out.
- Make an appointment with your child's doctor as soon as possible and tell the doctor your child may have been exposed to whooping cough.

2. If your child has been diagnosed with whooping cough by their doctor:

- Tell your child's school that a doctor diagnosed your child with whooping cough.
- Keep your child home until they have been on appropriate antibiotics for five full days to treat whooping cough.
- The school may ask your child for a note that states your child has whooping cough.

3. If your child has NOT been diagnosed with whooping cough but has symptoms:

- Your school may require a note stating that your child does not have whooping cough.
- Your child can return to school and activities based on the facility's infectious disease policy.

4. If your child does NOT develop symptoms but has been exposed:

- Ask your doctor if antibiotics are right for your child. Usually, antibiotics are appropriate if your child is immuno-compromised or lives with the following people:
 - a. A woman who is pregnant
 - b. A baby younger than 12 months old
 - c. Anyone with health conditions that may be worse with whooping cough.
- Watch for the development of symptoms for 21 days after last exposure.

5. Please make sure your family's whooping cough vaccinations are up to date. Vaccination is the best way to prevent getting whooping cough; however, protection from the vaccine decreases over time. If you need the vaccine, please contact your doctor or local health department.

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