



Pertussis

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, commonly called Whooping Cough, is a highly contagious bacterial infection of the respiratory tract that causes an uncontrollable, violent cough lasting several weeks or even months. Pertussis is caused by bacteria that are found in the mouth, nose and throat of an infected person. Pertussis may begin with cold-like symptoms or a dry cough that progress to episodes of severe coughing.

How is pertussis spread?

Pertussis is spread from person to person by direct contact with droplets from the nose and throat when you cough or sneeze and the droplets enter the nose or mouth of another person.

If you think you or your child has pertussis, you need to let your doctor know prior to arriving for your appointment to ensure precautions are taken in the office to prevent spreading pertussis to other people.

What symptoms should I watch for?

Pertussis usually begins as mild cold-like symptoms including sneezing, runny nose, low-grade fever, and a mild cough. Within 2 weeks, the cough becomes more severe and is characterized by frequent episodes of rapid coughs followed by a high pitched whooping sound and vomiting. Symptoms can last from 6 to 10 weeks and are more frequent at night. The symptoms of pertussis can start about 6 to 21 days, usually 7 to 10 days after being in contact with someone with pertussis. Adults and partially immunized children generally have milder symptoms.

What is the treatment for pertussis?

Antibiotics are often prescribed and will not make you feel better, but they help to reduce how infectious you are to other people.

People who have or may have pertussis should stay away from young children and infants until appropriate treatment has been completed.

How do I know if I have pertussis?

Your doctor can diagnose pertussis by having a swab taken from your nasopharynx (an area at the back of your nose).

How do I protect myself and others?

The best way to prevent pertussis is to make sure you have received all your vaccinations. The pertussis vaccine is a part of routine childhood immunizations and is given at 2, 4, 6 with a booster given at 18 months and at 4-6 years. Adults up to 54 years of age may be given a one-time booster as well, but you must be prepared to pay for this yourself. If you do not have a doctor, call the Vaccine Preventable Team at the health unit at (705) 731-7520 ext 8806.

You can further help stop the spread of pertussis by washing your hands after coughing or sneezing, before preparing foods and before eating. If you do cough or sneeze, cover your nose and mouth. Do not share cigarettes or drink from the same glass, water bottle or straw as others.

Is there anything special I need to know about pertussis?

Neither vaccination nor natural infection with pertussis guarantees lifelong protection against pertussis. It is recommended if you are infected with pertussis that you continue with the routine schedule of vaccination. An infected person with pertussis can return to day care, school or other settings once they have received 5 days of an appropriate antibiotic or after 21 days from the beginning of the cough.

Call the Communicable Disease Team: ext. 8809