

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a respiratory illness caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*. This disease is very contagious and can be very dangerous, especially to infants and young children. Whooping cough is spread from person to person by coughing or sneezing around others. Symptoms usually develop within seven to ten days after being exposed, but sometimes not for as long as 6 weeks. Older adults may become infected and not even know it. Many infants that come into contact with these infected adults then become infected themselves much more severely. This is why vaccination of both adults and children is very important.

Early symptoms of whooping cough can last for one to two weeks and may initially appear as the common cold. This often causes a delay in diagnosis. As symptoms begin, parents may notice signs such as: Runny nose, low-grade fever, mild cough and apnea (a pause in breathing) in infants. As the disease progresses, the traditional symptoms of whooping cough begin to appear. These typical signs of whooping cough may include: fits of many, rapid coughs followed by a high-pitched “whoop”, vomiting and exhaustion after coughing fits. Recovery from this infection can happen very slowly and the coughing can last for up to ten weeks!

A child may become exhausted after coughing fits and may even vomit as a result of the severe cough. However, children with whooping cough generally appear fairly well in between coughing fits. Also, fever is typically minimal throughout the course of the disease. Often times, teens and adults don't experience the “whoop” with coughing as generally noted with younger children. The infection in teens and adults is generally milder, especially in those who have been vaccinated.

Vaccination is the best way to prevent the spread of this disease. Adults, teens and children should all be vaccinated against pertussis. The recommended vaccine for infants and children is called DTap. This is a combination vaccine that protects against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis. Protection with these vaccines fades over time. Therefore, preteens, teens and adults are encouraged to get a booster called Tdap. Adults who are exposed to children on a regular basis should request that they receive a tetanus booster with pertussis (Tdap) for their next dose. The recommended schedules for these vaccines are:

Children and infants (DTap): 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 15-18 months\*, 4-6 years

Teens (Tdap): 7<sup>th</sup> grade or 11-12 years

Adults: One Tdap vaccination is sufficient for pertussis immunity. However, tetanus (Td) vaccination is recommended every 10 years.

\*The 15-18 month dose is often overlooked or forgotten about by parents. Make sure your child has his/her fourth DTap between 15-18 months for proper immunity!