

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Fact Sheet

What is Pertussis? Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory disease.

Who gets Pertussis? Anyone can get pertussis, but **infants and young children are at highest risk of life threatening consequences.** Older children and adults may develop milder symptoms, go undiagnosed and then spread the disease to others. **If your infant (under 1 year) is exposed to pertussis please contact their physician.**

How is Pertussis spread? It is spread during close contact with an infected person. Discharges from nose or throat carry bacteria, most commonly by airborne droplets.

What are the symptoms? Early symptoms are similar to a cold, with runny nose; sneezing and coughing that may progress to persistent coughing. Fits of coughing may be followed by a “whooping” gasp to breathe in air. Coughing attacks may also lead to vomiting. The illness can last for 6-10 weeks. However, older children, adults and very young infants may not develop the whoop.

How soon do the symptoms appear? The symptoms may appear from 6-21 days after exposure.

When is it contagious? Pertussis is most contagious during the early symptoms of the runny nose, but can remain contagious for up to 3 weeks. After 5 days of effective antibiotic treatment, it is no longer contagious.

What is the treatment? The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends treatment as follows:

- Erythromycin (oral) for 14 days
- Studies have documented that **azithromycin dihydrate** for 5 days or **clarithromycin** for 7 days, may be as effective as erythromycin and have fewer side effects and better compliance.

Should people who have been in contact with a person with pertussis be treated? Preventative treatment (prophylaxis) with an appropriate antibiotic is recommended regardless of age or immunization status for household and other close contacts. The effectiveness of the pertussis vaccine after 3 doses is about 80%; protection begins to decrease after about 3 years.

How can we prevent it?

- Children should receive a primary series of DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, and acellular pertussis) vaccination according to the current recommendation.
- Adolescents aged 11-18 years should receive a single dose of Tdap instead of Td for booster or to start a primary series if unvaccinated against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis
- All adults aged 19-64 years should receive a single dose of Tdap to replace a single dose of Td booster. Special emphasis on adults with close contact to infants (e.g., childcare and healthcare personnel, and parents)
- Testing individuals that are symptomatic to identify pertussis along with giving an appropriate antibiotic early can help lower the chances of spreading the disease to others.
- Use good personal hygiene measures-i.e. covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue and washing hands thoroughly and often.

For additional information go to www.cdc.gov or www.pertussis.com