



## PERTUSSIS (Whooping Cough)

Pertussis is a very contagious bacterial infection of the respiratory tract. Usually it causes a persistent cough that follows a normal cold. The child has episodes of violent coughing that end with the typical high-pitched *Whoop*, and occasionally vomiting is seen. Between bursts of coughing the child appears well. Coughing attacks may continue to occur for 10-12 weeks. Pertussis is frequently complicated by pneumonia and ear infections, particularly in infants. Death from pertussis is rare.

### **Who gets this disease?**

Pertussis occurs in all age groups. Untreated cases in older children and adults can spread pertussis to infants and young children at home. It is important that all infants and young children be up to date with pertussis vaccination. The most serious disease and complications are seen in infants and very young children.

### **How is it spread?**

The bacterium is spread by direct contact with discharge from the nose or throat of an infected person, or by breathing in infected droplets in the air when an infected person coughs. The period of greatest risk of spread is during the early "cold" stage.

### **What are the symptoms?**

The disease begins with the cold like symptoms such as runny nose and watery eyes, and cough. The cough becomes more persistent. Within 2 weeks the cough occurs as bouts of uncontrollable cough often with a "whoop" sound. Vomiting often follows the cough. The "whoop" sound may be absent in older children and adults.

### **What if a child is exposed to pertussis?**

1. All close contacts younger than 7 years of age who have not completed the four-dose primary series should complete the series with the minimum intervals.

2. Close contacts who are 4-6 years of age and who have not yet received the second booster dose (usually the fifth dose of DTaP) should be vaccinated.
3. Any close contact 11 years old and older can receive a single dose of Tdap if it has been at least 2 years since the previous Td.
4. Your physician may recommend antibiotics for your child and all close contacts.
5. Tdap is recommended to be given with each pregnancy.

### **How can the spread of this disease be prevented?**

A combination vaccine of Diphtheria, Tetanus and acellular Pertussis (DTaP) is **required** for both childcare and school attendance. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends immunizing children against pertussis, along with diphtheria and tetanus, beginning as early as six weeks of age. The five dose series should be completed at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, and 15-18 months, and 4-6 years of age. If the child has a contraindication to the pertussis vaccine, they would receive a vaccine called DT which does not contain the pertussis antigen.

A single booster dose of Diphtheria, Tetanus, and acellular Pertussis (Tdap) is recommended for adolescents 11-18 years of age who have completed the recommended childhood DTP/DTaP vaccination series. Adults who are 18 and older should receive one dose of Tdap if they have not received Tdap previously. The Td booster is recommended every 10 years thereafter to provide protection.

### **Reportable?**

Yes. Pertussis is reportable by New Hampshire law to the Division of Public Health Services, Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at (603) 271-4496.