



PERTUSSIS (Whooping Cough)

Pertussis is a very contagious bacterial infection of the respiratory tract. Usually it appears as a persistent cough that follows what seems like a cold.

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. 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 first two weeks.

What are the symptoms?

The disease begins with the cold like symptoms such as runny nose and watery eyes, and progresses to include cough that becomes more severe and persistent. Within 2 weeks, the patient has episodes of violent coughing that sometimes end with the typical high-pitched “*whoop*.” The “*whoop*” sound may be absent in older children and adults. Vomiting often follows the cough. Between bursts of coughing, the patient 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.

What if someone is exposed to pertussis?

For close contacts to a pertussis case:

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

2. 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. 11 years old and older can receive a single dose of Tdap.
4. Pregnant women should receive Tdap with each pregnancy.
5. Your physician may recommend antibiotics for close contacts.

How can this disease 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, 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.