

PERTUSSIS

What is Pertussis?

Pertussis, commonly known as “whooping cough,” is an acute bacterial infection of the respiratory tract caused by the bacterium *Bordetella Pertussis*.

Symptoms of Pertussis

The first symptoms of Pertussis are similar to those of a common cold:

- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Mild cough
- Low-grade fever

After about 1 to 2 weeks, the dry, irritating cough evolves into coughing spells. During a coughing spell, which can last for more than a minute, the person may turn red or purple. At the end of a spell, the person may make a characteristic whooping sound when breathing in or may vomit. Between spells, the person usually feels well.

Not everyone will develop the characteristic coughing episodes with their accompanying whoop. Sometimes infants don't cough or whoop as older kids do. They may look as if they're gasping for air with a reddened face and may actually stop breathing for a few seconds during particularly bad spells. Adults and adolescents with whooping cough may have milder or atypical symptoms, such as a prolonged cough without the coughing spells or the whoop.

How do People get Pertussis?

Pertussis is highly contagious. The bacteria spread from person to person through tiny drops of fluid from an infected person's nose or mouth. These may become airborne when the person sneezes, coughs, or laughs. Others then can become infected by inhaling the drops or getting the drops on their hands and then touching their mouths or noses.

Infected people are most contagious during the earliest stages of the illness up to about 2 weeks after the cough begins. Antibiotics shorten the period of contagiousness to 5 days following the start of antibiotic treatment.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Pertussis

The diagnosis of Pertussis is usually made based on its characteristic history and physical examination. A laboratory test may be done, which involves taking a specimen from the back of the patient's throat.

Pertussis is usually treated with a multi-day course of antibiotics. Some children may need to be hospitalized. People in close contact with an infected person usually need to be treated with antibiotics and efforts should be taken to minimize an infant's exposure.

How Can I Help Prevent the Spread of Pertussis?

Immunization is the best preventive measure in stopping the spread of Pertussis.



For more information, contact a Public Health Nurse at the City-County Health Department at 454-6950 or visit www.cchdmt.org or www.cdc.gov