

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)



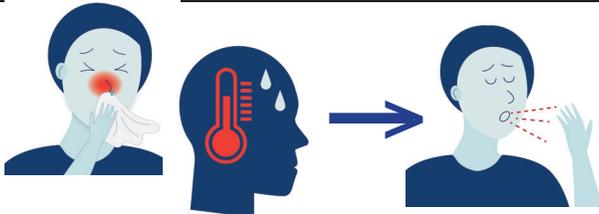
WHAT IS IT?

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) is caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. It is a very contagious illness characterized by violent coughing that can lead to a “whooping” sound after an episode. Spread occurs through breathing in droplets from an infected person’s cough or sneeze; symptoms typically appear within 10 days. Complications such as apnea, pneumonia, and even death can result. Babies tend to suffer more serious complications, and about half may need to be hospitalized.

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

- **Up to 40,000** cases are reported annually in the US, with a small number leading to death.
- **24 million** cases and **160,000** deaths are estimated to occur globally.
- **1%** of cases in unvaccinated infants and young children result in death.
- Pertussis disease events appear to be cyclical, occurring every **3-5 years**, likely due to waning immunity.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS



Early symptoms resemble a cold, with low grade fever. Can progress to violent coughing fits about a week later. Cough can persist for weeks.

WHAT DO I DO ABOUT IT?

Because the pertussis bacteria is transmitted person to person:

1. Practice good hand hygiene through handwashing and/or use of a hand sanitizer.
2. Practice respiratory hygiene, covering coughs and sneezes and properly disposing of tissues.
3. Keep infected persons isolated from others as much as possible, following medical advice. (Casual contacts may be at a lower risk of infection.)
4. Antibiotics may provide some relief early in the infection, ideally before coughing fits start.
5. Preventive antibiotics can be given to susceptible people (e.g., infants) who might be exposed to ill individuals, such as within a household.
6. A vaccine with several booster doses is available for adults, children, and infants as young as 2 months.

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