

PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH)

→ Childcare and preschools use these pages, schools use pages 223-224

CONSULT with local or state health department BEFORE USING THIS FACT SHEET.

REPORTABLE: **Provider:** This disease is **reportable** to the local or state health department.
Parents/guardians: Inform your childcare provider if your child has this illness.

Pertussis (also known as whooping cough) can be a serious illness, especially in young, unvaccinated children. Adults and older children with pertussis may be the source of infection for infants and young children.

CAUSE: *Bordetella pertussis*, a bacterium.

SYMPTOMS: Pertussis begins with a runny nose, sneezing, possibly a low-grade fever, and mild cough. After a week or two, a persistent cough develops, which may occur in explosive bursts (paroxysmal coughing), sometimes ending in a high-pitched whoop and vomiting. A whoop may be absent in older children, adults and infants younger than 6 months. Coughing attacks occur more frequently at night. The coughing attacks usually increase during the first two weeks of illness and then remain the same for two or three more weeks before gradually decreasing. Some people, particularly infants, may develop pneumonia and ear infections. Pertussis can occur in vaccinated children, but the illness is usually milder.

Older children and adults may have a less typical cough; however, it is usually persistent and may lead to vomiting or a whoop. Although the disease is less severe in adults and older children, they can unknowingly infect infants and preschoolers who are at risk for serious illness.

SPREAD: When a person with pertussis coughs tiny droplets with pertussis bacteria into the air and another person breathes them in.

INCUBATION: It takes 6 to 20 days, usually 7-10 days, from the time a person is exposed until symptoms start.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD: Begins at the time of early cold-like symptoms, before a persistent cough and explosive bursts of coughing start. Persons remain contagious until three weeks after explosive bursts of coughing begin. Those treated with antibiotics are contagious until 5 days of treatment are completed.

EXCLUSION: Until 5 days after appropriate antibiotic treatment begins.

DIAGNOSIS: To confirm a diagnosis of pertussis, laboratory tests are performed on material collected by placing a flexible swab through the nostril to the back of the nose and throat. Some lab tests (pertussis cultures) are less accurate after antibiotics are given.

TREATMENT: Call your healthcare provider.

1. Antibiotics shorten the time a person with pertussis can give it to others, but may do little to lessen their symptoms. Treatment is most effective if started soon after cough begins. Antibiotics are usually not given to people who have had a cough for more than 20 days because they will no longer be helpful.
2. Erythromycin (40 to 50 mg/kg per day orally in four divided doses, maximum 2 grams per day) for 14 days, as tolerated, is recommended for household and

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TREATMENT CONTINUED: other close contacts, such as those in childcare, regardless of age and vaccination status. Some experts recommend the estolate preparation for children but not for adults.

3. Clarithromycin (Biaxin®) for 7 days, or azithromycin (Zithromax®) for 5 days, may be effective alternatives.
4. Bactrim® or Septra® for 14 days are possible alternatives, but are not recommended for use in pregnant women.

PREVENTION/CONTROL:

1. Minnesota state law requires that all children 2 months of age or older enrolled in childcare settings or schools be vaccinated against pertussis (along with tetanus and diphtheria) or have a legal exemption. Children should receive a DTaP at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 12 to 18 months, and a booster dose at 4-6 years of age.
2. If your child develops the symptoms described above within 20 days after last contact with the infected child, keep your child at home and call your healthcare provider.

Exposure to pertussis:

3. If your child is exposed to pertussis and is not up to date on pertussis vaccinations, please call your healthcare provider or public health clinic to have your child vaccinated.
4. Call your healthcare provider if you or your child have been exposed to pertussis because you may need to receive preventive antibiotic treatment.

For more information, you or your healthcare provider may call Hennepin County Community Health Department at (952) 351-5230, or call your local health department.