

Pertussis “Whooping Cough” Disease

Keep your child and yourself safe. By getting all vaccines on time, you and your child can be protected from many vaccine preventable diseases over your lifetimes. Immunizations have saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

What is pertussis?

- Pertussis, or “whooping cough”, is a serious infection of the lungs and throat caused by *Bordetella pertussis* bacteria.
- People of any age can get pertussis. People can get pertussis many times during their life, as they do not develop permanent immunity.
- Young children who have not been immunized get sicker than older children and adults.
- Each year in Canada, 1 to 3 deaths occur due to pertussis.

Serious complications of pertussis include:

- Apnea (stopping breathing)
- Pneumonia
- Convulsions or seizures
- Encephalopathy or brain damage

These complications happen most often in infants.

What are the symptoms?

- Pertussis starts like a common cold with symptoms such as sneezing, runny nose, mild fever and a mild cough.
- Over the next week or two, the cough gets worse, leading to severe coughing spells that often end with a whooping sound before the next breath.
- This cough can last a month or two and occurs more often at night. The cough can make a person gag or spit out mucous, and make it hard to take a breath.
- Babies less than six months old, teenagers, and adults may not make the whooping sound.
- Therefore, anyone who has a cough that lasts more than one week should see a doctor.

How is pertussis spread?

- Pertussis spreads easily when an infected person coughs, sneezes or has close contact with others.
- Sharing food, drinks or cigarettes, or kissing someone who has the pertussis bacteria can also put you at risk.
- A person with pertussis who does not get treatment can spread the germ to others for up to three weeks after the cough starts.

Is there a treatment?

Pertussis is treated with antibiotics, which help reduce the spread of infection and the duration of illness if given during the very early stage of the illness.

People at high risk of serious illness who are in close contact with someone with pertussis are given an antibiotic to prevent the disease. This includes infants less than one year old and pregnant women in the last three months of pregnancy, as well as all of their household and daycare contacts.

People who have pertussis or may have been exposed to pertussis should not have contact with babies or young children until they have been properly tested and/or treated for pertussis.

If you have been in contact with a person who has pertussis, you should call your doctor, nurse practitioner or local health unit for more information.

Pertussis containing vaccines

Pertussis containing vaccines are part of the routine childhood immunization program (2 months of age to grade 8).

Protection from the vaccine decreases after several years. A vaccine for youth and adults is available. Ask your public health nurse or doctor for more information about this vaccine.

Individual's immunization information will be recorded in the electronic provincial immunization registry, known as Panorama.

Recorded information will be used to:

- *Manage immunization records;*
- *Notify you if you or your child needs an immunization; and*
- *Monitor how well vaccines work in preventing vaccine preventable diseases.*

Your immunization records may also be shared with health care professionals in order to provide public health services; assist with diagnosis and treatment; and to control the spread of vaccine preventable diseases.

**For more information contact your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner
OR HealthLine at 811.**

References: Canadian Immunization Guide, 7th ed., (2006); Red Book, 28th ed., (2009); HealthLink BC, 15c (2008).