

PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH)

WHAT IS PERTUSSIS?

Pertussis is better known as the whooping cough. It is a highly contagious illness of the upper respiratory tract that is most often spread through coughing and sneezing.

SYMPTOMS:

Early signs:

- Runny nose
- Mild, occasional cough
- Low-grade fever possible

Later Signs (+2 weeks):

- Fits of many, rapid coughs, with possible “whooping” sound
- Vomiting/gagging due to coughing spells
- Exhaustion

DIAGNOSIS:

- History of signs and symptoms
- Physical examination
- Laboratory test: sampling secretions from the back of the throat. Swabbing up through the nose and into the throat does this.

TREATMENT:

- People diagnosed with pertussis are usually put on a 5-day antibiotic regimen.
- People with pertussis should be isolated for 5 days while undergoing treatment. This means little to no public contact, including school, work, etc. It is important that patients cover their mouth while coughing or sneezing, preferably into the elbow.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS:

FACT	MYTH
ANYONE children can get pertussis.	Only small children can get pertussis.
Although the vaccine helps prevent a person from contracting pertussis, it does not ensure that they are immune to the disease. However, the vaccine does decrease a person’s chances of getting pertussis and may cause milder symptoms during the disease.	If a person receives the pertussis vaccine, they are immune.
The cough present in pertussis <u>does not</u> always have a “whooping” sound. Especially in people who have been vaccinated, this sound may not be present.	Pertussis always presents with a “whooping” sound cough.

THE VACCINE:

The pertussis vaccine is also known as the Tdap and/or DTaP. Both of these vaccinations include the pertussis element. The DTaP is administered to children in 5 doses over a period of time at ages 15-18 months, 2, 4, 6, and 4-6. The Tdap is generally administered to 7-10 year olds who are not immunized, adolescents ages 11-18 years, and adults 19 through 64 years of age. The disease is most dangerous in infants and elderly, as well as people with asthma and those who with compromised immunity.