

Pertussis

Frequently Asked Questions



What is pertussis?

Pertussis (whooping cough) is a very contagious respiratory disease. It is caused by bacteria and lasts for many weeks.

What are the symptoms?

The early symptoms of pertussis can include cold-like symptoms, a mild cough, and a fever. After a few weeks, coughing can become severe, leading to violent and rapid coughing fits, which can be followed by a whooping sound and also vomiting and exhaustion. These coughing fits can last for weeks.

How does it spread?

Pertussis is spread person to person by contact with airborne droplets from the nose and mouth of an infected person.

Who is at risk of developing pertussis?

Anyone can get pertussis. People who are not fully vaccinated are more likely to get more severe disease. Also people who live in the same household with a person with pertussis are very likely to get the disease.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

Pertussis is diagnosed by a doctor based on the signs of illness (i.e., whooping, coughing fits, etc.) and/or laboratory tests. Laboratory tests may include blood tests or a nasal swab. Antibiotic medication prescribed by a doctor is used to treat pertussis and prevent the spread of disease.

What should I do if I think I have it?

If you believe that you have pertussis, call your doctor immediately.

How is it prevented?

- Vaccination with a pertussis-containing vaccine (like DTaP for children or Tdap for adolescents and adults) is the best way to prevent illness.
- People with pertussis should stay at home and away from others until they have completed 5 days of their antibiotics. Always cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve when you sneeze and cough.
- Wash your hands with soap or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers, especially before eating or touching your face.

For more information contact your doctor, refer to <http://www.phila.gov/Health/> or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740.

