

PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH)

WHAT IS WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS)?

Whooping cough, also known as pertussis, is caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*. A vaccine exists for this disease. Pertussis may be severe in infants and young children, especially those who have not had three doses of vaccine, resulting in hospitalizations, pneumonia, neurologic problems, and death. The cough may last as long as 3 months. Pertussis may not be as severe in adults and fully immunized children.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Begins with cold-like symptoms including mild cough and low-grade or no fever
- Cough becomes more severe, causing coughing spells or fits.
- Coughing spells may be followed by vomiting, difficulty catching breath, face turning blue, and/or high-pitched whoop
- Appears well between coughing spells

INCUBATION PERIOD

Ranges from 4-21 days (usually 7-10 days)

HOW IS IT SPREAD?

Transmission is by direct contact with nose/throat discharges of an infected person.

HOW LONG CAN A PERSON PASS THE INFECTION TO OTHERS?

A person is most contagious in the early stages of the disease. Individuals are virtually noncontagious after the third week of coughing, or after five days of appropriate antibiotic treatment.

PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Report the infection to the local or state health department within **24 hours** of diagnosis.

CONTROL OF SPREAD

- **EXCLUDE** individuals with pertussis until they have completed five days of appropriate antibiotic treatment or until three weeks after the onset of cough or until the cough has stopped, whichever period is shorter.
 - If close contacts to a person with pertussis have pertussis symptoms, they should be excluded from child care or school until meeting the criteria listed above.
- Household or other close contacts (regardless of immunization status) should be referred to a health care provider to receive appropriate antibiotics to prevent infection or reduce symptoms.
- An antibiotic to prevent infection is frequently recommended for child care/preschool classroom contacts and rarely recommended for school classroom contacts.
- Consult with the child care center or school nurse, or state or local public health agency, about notifying parents/guardians of exposed classmates.
- Pertussis vaccine is routinely given in combination with diphtheria and tetanus vaccine (DTaP and Tdap) starting at age 2 months.
- Children should receive five doses of pertussis vaccine by 4-6 years of age.
- A pertussis booster (Tdap) is recommended for children >10 years of age and adults
- Review pertussis immunization records and recommend DTaP or Tdap vaccine for under-immunized students and staff. Vaccine administration after exposure will not prevent infection; however, it may provide protection against future exposure.
- The Colorado School Immunization Rules require all students older than 3 months of age to have pertussis immunizations or an exemption to immunization.
- The number of required pertussis doses varies by the age of the student.
- Additional information is available at: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/pertussis-whooping-cough>

TREATMENT

Appropriate antibiotic treatment shortens the period of contagiousness, but does not reduce symptoms except when given during the incubation period or in the early stages of the disease.