



FACT SHEET

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

What is it?

Pertussis (also called "whooping cough") is a highly contagious bacterial infection that causes a severe cough.

Symptoms

- Symptoms appear 6 to 21 (average 7-10) days after exposure to an infected person.
- Pertussis may start with cold symptoms or simply a dry cough followed by episodes of severe coughing. Fever is absent or mild.
- **Gagging or vomiting** may occur after severe coughing spells. Cough may be worse at night.
- The person may look and feel healthy between coughing episodes.
- Immunized school children, adolescents, and adults often have milder illness than younger children.
- Infants with Pertussis may not develop a severe cough. They may only have a mild cough, decreased feeding, and may have difficulty breathing or turn bluish.

How is it spread?

- Pertussis is spread through droplets from the mouth and nose when a person with pertussis coughs, sneezes, or talks.
- Untreated, persons with pertussis can spread the infection for several weeks.
- Adults and older children with unrecognized pertussis often spread the infection to others, including young children.

Who gets it?

- Anyone who is exposed to the bacteria can get pertussis.
- Pertussis vaccine prevents severe disease in young infants, but even a vaccinated person can get pertussis infection.
- Pertussis occurs in older children and adults because protection from the vaccine (DTP or DTaP) lasts only 5-10 years after the last dose.

Who is at greatest risk?

- Infants less than one year old are considered at **high** risk for complications of pertussis, including hospitalization, pneumonia, convulsions, and rarely, brain damage or death.

Treatment

- Treatment is most effective early in the disease. A health care provider must prescribe an antibiotic active against pertussis.
- Persons treated with antibiotics are no longer contagious after the first 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment have been completed.

Prevention

- Pertussis vaccine is included in DTaP and the new Tdap vaccine for adolescents and adults (available since 2006).
 - Before age 7, children should get 5 doses of the DTaP vaccine.
 - Doses are usually given at 2,4,6 and 15-18 months of age and 4-6 years of age.
 - The 4th dose may be given as early as 12 months of age.
 - Tdap should be given as a single booster dose to 11-64 year old individuals.
- Persons with cough illnesses should avoid contact with infants and expectant mothers, including visiting or working in labor, delivery, and nursery areas of hospitals and in child care settings.
- If you live or have close contact with someone who has pertussis, you should take antibiotics to prevent pertussis – contact your health care provider.

Report all cases to El Paso Department of Public Health by calling 915-771-5810