



## 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, 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.
  - DTaP doses are usually given at 2, 4, 6 and 15-18 months of age and 4-6 years of age.
  - The 4<sup>th</sup> DTaP dose may be given as early as 12 months of age.
  - Tdap vaccine should be given as a single booster dose to 11-64 year old individuals.
  - Pregnant women should receive a Tdap vaccine during each pregnancy to provide protective antibodies (proteins produced by the body to fight off disease) to your baby before birth. The best time to get the vaccine is during your 27<sup>th</sup> through 36<sup>th</sup> week of pregnancy.
  - Families of infants should make sure that all family members and caregivers are immunized against pertussis to protect yourself and the baby.
- 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 915-212-6520**