

PERTUSSIS

Reportable Disease

Pertussis (also known as whooping cough) can be a serious illness, especially in young, unvaccinated children. Adults and older children with pertussis may be the source of infection for infants and young children. This is a concern because in recent years, more adults, adolescents, and school-aged children have been contracting pertussis.

CAUSE

Bordetella pertussis, bacteria

SYMPTOMS

There are three stages of symptoms. Stage 1, catarrhal stage, lasts 1 to 2 weeks and symptoms may include runny nose, sneezing, mild cough, and possibly a low-grade fever (similar to the common cold). Infants may also experience apnea, or a pause in breathing. Stage 2, paroxysmal stage, usually lasts 1 to 6 weeks. Symptoms include persistent cough, which may occur in explosive bursts (paroxysmal coughing), sometimes ending in a high-pitched whoop and vomiting. Infants may also experience perioral cyanosis, or blue lips due to lack of oxygen. The typical whoop and/or paroxysmal coughing may be absent in older children, adults, partially vaccinated children and infants younger than 6 months. Coughing attacks occur more frequently at night. Some people, particularly infants, may develop pneumonia and ear infections. Stage 3, convalescent stage, lasts about 2 to 3 weeks as the cough gradually lessens.

Pertussis can occur in vaccinated children, but the illness is usually milder. Older children and adults may have a less typical cough; however, it is usually persistent and may lead to vomiting or a whoop. Although the disease may be less severe in adults and older children, they can unknowingly infect infants and preschoolers who are at risk for serious illness.

SPREAD

When a person with pertussis coughs or sneezes tiny droplets with *Bordetella pertussis* bacteria into the air and another person breathes them in. Many infants who get pertussis are infected by older siblings, parents or caregivers who might not even know they have the disease.

INCUBATION (time from exposure to onset of symptoms)

5 to 21 days, usually 7 to 10 days

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD

Highly contagious during the first 2 weeks of illness, which corresponds to the catarrhal stage and early part of paroxysmal stage. After this point, individuals are less contagious for about 3 more weeks. **Those treated with antibiotics are no longer contagious after 5 days of treatment is completed.**

EXCLUSION

Until 5 days after appropriate antibiotic treatment begins. During this time the person with pertussis should NOT participate in any child care, school, or community activities. If an individual is suspected, but not confirmed, for pertussis, exclude until 5 days of antibiotics are completed or until the laboratory test comes back negative.

DIAGNOSIS

To confirm a diagnosis of pertussis, laboratory tests are performed on material collected by placing a flexible swab through the nostril to the back of the nose and throat. Some lab tests (pertussis cultures) are less accurate after antibiotics are given or if significant time has passed since the onset of symptoms.

TREATMENT

Antibiotics shorten the time a person with pertussis can give it to others, but may do little to lessen their symptoms. Treatment is most effective if started soon after cough begins. Antibiotics are usually not given to people who have had a cough for more than 21 days because they will no longer be helpful.

PREVENTION/CONTROL

- The best way to prevent pertussis (whooping cough) among infants, children, teens, and adults is to get vaccinated. Also, keep infants and other people at high risk for pertussis complications away from infected people.
- Current CDC pertussis vaccine recommendations for various populations can be found here: <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/prevention.html>
- Women should receive a Tdap vaccine during **each pregnancy**. The best time to get the vaccine is the **27th through 36th week of pregnancy**. More information on the importance of vaccination during pregnancy can be found here: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/rec-vac/pregnant/whooping-cough/get-vaccinated.html>
- People who are exposed to pertussis should contact their healthcare provider or public health clinic to either be vaccinated, if they are currently unvaccinated, or to possibly receive preventative antibiotics.
- People who develop the symptoms of pertussis within 21 days of exposure should stay home and call their healthcare provider.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with secretions from the nose or mouth.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled.

For more information please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at <http://cchealth.org/pertussis/>