



# DISEASE PREVENTION

## PERTUSSIS

### What is pertussis (whooping cough) ?

Pertussis is a bacterial infection that causes a long-lasting cough.

Symptoms develop within 21 days of exposure to pertussis and include cold-like symptoms followed in one to two weeks by coughing fits that can continue to occur for weeks to months. It can turn into severe coughing spells followed by gagging or vomiting, and often a “whoop” sound when the person tries to catch their breath.

Not all people who get pertussis have the “whoop” with the cough, especially babies under 6 months. Infants under 1 year are most at risk for getting very sick with pertussis.

- Infants with whooping cough may not even be able to cough — instead, they may have trouble feeding and breathing, and may turn blue. Infants are at highest risk for hospitalization and dying from the disease.
- Babies older than 6 months and kids with whooping cough often have severe coughing spells that make it hard for them to eat, drink, breathe, and sleep.

### How does pertussis spread?

Whooping cough spreads easily by coughing, sneezing, and even talking. If untreated, an infected person can spread whooping cough for several weeks.

### I know someone who has been diagnosed with pertussis. How do I know if I am a close contact?

You are considered a close contact of someone with pertussis if:

- You live in the same household.
- You spent many hours together while they were symptomatic. This could include being in the same room, household, or a confined space like a car.
- You had direct contact with respiratory droplets, such as coughing, sneezing, kissing or sharing utensils with the infected person.



## People who have been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed pertussis while they had symptoms should do the following:

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- Call their healthcare provider to ask if they should take antibiotics to prevent the disease.
- Watch for symptoms for 21 days after the most recent exposure and stay home if they get sick.
- If they get sick, call their health care provider and stay away from children under 1, pregnant women, and anyone who might expose infants or pregnant women.
- Make sure their whooping cough vaccinations are up to date.
- **MOST AT RISK**: People in contact with infants under 1, pregnant women who may expose their new infant, or anyone with immunocompromise should call their health care provider and ask about antibiotics to prevent the disease after an exposure.

## My doctor says I have pertussis. What should I do?

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- Take your medicine as directed by your doctor.
- **ISOLATE At Home**: Until you've taken antibiotics for five days, stay home from work or school and away from pregnant women, children under 1, and others who have frequent contact with infants or pregnant women.
  - If you choose not to take antibiotics, stay home for 21 days after your cough started.
- **Wear a mask** if you need to seek healthcare or come out of isolation for any reason before you finish your antibiotics or before 21 days have passed since your cough started (if you did not take antibiotics).

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Information adapted from WADOH's "Whooping Cough Fact Sheet for Patients and their Close Contacts"

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