

## Pertussis Fact Sheet

### What is pertussis?

Pertussis or whooping cough is a very contagious bacterial infection that causes coughing and choking. It is caused by germs in the mouth, nose and throat of an infected person. Pertussis is spread through droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks.

### Who gets pertussis?

The vaccination against pertussis is included in the DTaP and DTP vaccines. Children less than 7 years of age should get five doses of this vaccine at ages 2, 4, 6, and 15–18 months, and at age 4–6 years. A booster for adolescents (Tdap) is recommended at age 10–11 years. The vaccination is about 80%–85% effective.

Adults can also receive a booster vaccination (Tdap) to protect against pertussis. This is especially important for adults who have contact with infants, to protect infants from the disease.

### What are the symptoms of pertussis?

The symptoms usually begin 5 to 21 days after exposure to an infected person (average 7–10 days). The disease starts with symptoms that look like a common cold, including runny nose, low-grade fever and a mild cough. The illness may lead to attacks of severe coughing that often lead to choking and vomiting. There may or may not be a “whooping” sound when inhaling after coughing. The cough can last as long as 3 months. The illness may be milder in children, adolescents, or adults who were previously vaccinated. Anyone with a cough that lasts more than two weeks, or with severe uncontrollable coughing fits followed by gagging or vomiting, should see a healthcare provider to be evaluated for pertussis.

### How is pertussis diagnosed and treated?

Medical providers can check for pertussis by taking a swab of the nose. Antibiotics in the “erythromycin family” are used to treat pertussis—not all antibiotics are effective. Persons with pertussis must take an approved antibiotic for five days for them to become non-contagious. This means that a person diagnosed and treated for pertussis should not return to day care, school, work, etc., until the antibiotic has been taken for at least five days. In most cases, the infected person will continue to cough for several additional weeks, but they will no longer be able to spread the disease.

### What are the three ways we control the spread of pertussis?

Infants and children are vaccinated (5 doses) before the age of seven. Boosters against pertussis should be given to adolescents and adults.

Persons infected with pertussis are treated with antibiotics and do not return to work, day care, etc., until they have been treated for five [5] days with antibiotics.

Antibiotics are given as prevention to household members of a confirmed case of pertussis. Also, certain “high risk” contacts should be treated, including pregnant women in the last month of pregnancy, infants under one year of age, and healthcare workers

Close contacts with immunodeficiency conditions or other underlying medical conditions like chronic lung disease or cystic fibrosis should consult their medical providers.

**For further information, contact Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department at (253) 798-6410 (press “0” for the operator).**