

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

WHAT IS IT?

- ✓ Pertussis (“whooping cough”) is a highly contagious bacterial infection that causes a severe cough.

SYMPTOMS

- ✓ Symptoms appear 6 to 21 days (average 7-10 days) after exposure to an infected person.
- ✓ Pertussis may start with cold symptoms or a dry cough followed by episodes of severe coughing. 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. Fever is absent or mild.
- ✓ Immunized school children, adolescents, and adults often have milder illness than young 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, older children, and healthcare workers with unrecognized pertussis can spread the infection to others, including young children and pregnant women.

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.
- ✓ Pertussis occurs in older children and adults because protection from the vaccine (DTP, DTaP) is not 100% and decreases over time.

WHO IS AT GREATEST RISK?

- ✓ Infants less than one year old have the **highest** risk of severe pertussis, including hospitalization, pneumonia, convulsions, and rarely, brain damage or death.
- ✓ Unimmunized or partly immunized children are also at higher risk for pertussis infection and severe disease.
- ✓ Pregnant women with pertussis near the time of delivery may spread it to their newborns.

TREATMENT

- ✓ Early in the disease, an antibiotic active against pertussis can help decrease transmission to others.
- ✓ Persons treated with antibiotics are no longer contagious after the first 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment have been completed.

PREVENTION

- ✓ Get fully immunized against pertussis.
 - Children should get 5 doses of DTaP vaccine before age 7 years.
 - The following people should get a single dose of Tdap vaccine:
 - Children 7-10 years who are not fully vaccinated against pertussis.
 - Adolescents 11-18 years who have completed the DTP/DTaP series.
 - Pregnant and post-partum women, preferably during the third or late second trimester, after 20 weeks gestation.
 - All adults aged 19 years and older, especially adults who have or anticipate having close contact with infants less than 12 months old.
 - Household members and other close contacts of infants are especially important to get immunized.
- ✓ If you are sick with a cough, avoid contact with infants and expectant mothers. Do not visit or work in labor, delivery, and nursery areas of hospitals, and do not visit or work in child care settings.
- ✓ If you live with or have close contact with someone who has pertussis, you may need antibiotics to prevent pertussis – contact your health care provider.

Available in alternate formats.

Report all King County cases to
Public Health by calling (206) 296-4774.