



# Whooping Cough

## 1. What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a highly contagious bacterial infection. It is a respiratory disease caused by a bacterium called *Bordetella pertussis*. It is named after the distinctive whooping sound made at the end of a coughing spasm as the person tries to catch his or her breath.

## 2. How do you get whooping cough?

Anyone who is exposed to a coughing person with whooping cough in the infectious stage can get the disease. The pertussis vaccine usually prevents disease in infants and children, but even a vaccinated person can sometimes get whooping cough. Whooping cough can occur in older children and adults because protection from the vaccine (DTP or DTaP) received during childhood lasts only 5 to 10 years. Only recently has a pertussis vaccine become available for preteens, teens, and adults.

## 3. How is whooping cough spread?

Whooping cough is spread when germs pass from an infected person to others through coughing or sneezing. Many infants who get whooping cough catch it from their older siblings (brothers or sisters), or from their parent(s) or guardian(s) who might not know that they have the disease.

## 4. How do you know if you have whooping cough?

Whooping cough begins like a mild cold with a runny nose, sneezing, fever, and cough. After one or two weeks, the coughing spells get worse. Whooping cough can last for weeks and may lead to lung infection, rib fractures, seizures, brain damage, or death, especially in infants under one year of age.

## 5. How is whooping cough treated?

Treatment is most effective early in the disease. Your physician must prescribe an antibiotic active against pertussis. People who are treated with antibiotics are no longer contagious after the first five days of appropriate treatment.

## 6. Should infected people be restricted or excluded from work?

- Vaccination is the best way to protect infants, young children, and now teens and adults against whooping cough.
- The vaccination that protects your infant and child from whooping cough (pertussis) is called DTaP. The vaccine that protects preteens, teens, and adults from whooping cough is called Tdap.
  - *Both* vaccinations provide protection against two other diseases: diphtheria and tetanus.
- Parents should vaccinate their infant against whooping cough at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. Additional doses are needed at 15-18 months and 4-6 years of age.
- Complete all of the recommended doses of DTap vaccine to best protect your infant and child.

## 7. What other information do I need to know about whooping cough?

- Call for FREE immunizations in your area: 1-800-427-8700 or the Los Angeles County Immunization Program at (213)-351-7800.
- Your health care provider can be contacted for immunization services.
- Whooping cough is one of the most common preventable childhood diseases in in the United States.
- Infants, children, and preteens should be routinely vaccinated against whooping cough.
- Any adult who has not yet received the pertussis vaccine should receive it.
- Parents can help protect their infant by minimizing close contact with people who have cold symptoms or a cough illness, including family members.
- The advantage of DTap and Tdap is that you and your children can be protected against whooping cough, diphtheria and tetanus while receiving fewer injections.
- Ask your health care provider if your child can have combination vaccines (DTap or Tdap) to reduce the number of shots that your child needs.

### Sources

1. *Whooping Cough*. L.A. Department of Public Health <http://www.lapublichealth.org/acd/> .
2. *Whooping Cough*. California Department of Public Health [www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo) .
3. *Whooping Cough*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [www.cdc.gov/diseasesconditions](http://www.cdc.gov/diseasesconditions) .

For additional resources, please dial Information Line 211 or visit the L.A. County Department of Public Health website <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov> .