

PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH)

Information for School-Aged Children

CONSULT with local or state health department BEFORE USING THIS FACT SHEET.

<p>REPORTABLE: School: This disease is reportable to the local or state health department. Parents/guardians: Inform the school health office if your child has this illness.</p>

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 (teenagers), and school-aged children have been contracting pertussis.

Studies have shown that protection from pertussis vaccine decreases over time (3 to 5 years from the last vaccination).

CAUSE: *Bordetella pertussis*, a bacterium.

SYMPTOMS: Pertussis begins with a runny nose, sneezing, possibly a low-grade fever, and mild cough. After a week or two, a persistent cough develops that may occur in explosive bursts (paroxysmal coughing), sometimes ending in a high-pitched whoop and vomiting. A whoop may be absent in older children, adults, and infants younger than 6 months. Coughing attacks occur more frequently at night. The coughing attacks usually increase during the first two weeks of illness and then remain the same for two or three more weeks before gradually decreasing. Some people with pertussis, particularly infants, may develop pneumonia and ear infections. 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 disease is 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 infected with pertussis coughs or sneezes tiny droplets with pertussis bacteria into the air and another person breathes them in.

INCUBATION: It takes 6 to 20 days, usually 7 to 10 days, from the time a person is exposed until symptoms begin.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD: Begins at the time of early cold-like symptoms, before a persistent cough and explosive bursts of coughing develop. Persons remain contagious until three weeks after explosive bursts of coughing begin. Those treated with antibiotics are contagious until 5 days after treatment begins.

EXCLUSION: Until 5 days after appropriate antibiotic treatment begins. During this time the child with pertussis should NOT participate in any school or community activities.

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.

TREATMENT: Call your healthcare provider.

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TREATMENT CONTINUED: Antibiotics shorten the time a person with pertussis can give it to others, but may do little to lessen the symptoms. Treatment is most effective if started soon after cough begins. Antibiotics are usually not given to persons who have had a cough for more than 20 days because they will no longer be helpful.

1. Erythromycin (40 to 50 mg/kg per day orally in four divided doses, maximum 2 grams per day) for 14 days, as tolerated, is recommended for household and other close contacts, such as those in childcare, regardless of age and vaccination status. Some experts recommend the estolate preparation for children but not for adults.
2. Clarithromycin (Biaxin®) for 7 days, or azithromycin (Zithromax®) for 5 days, may be effective alternatives.
3. Bactrim® or Septra® for 14 days are possible alternatives, but are not recommended for use in pregnant women.

PREVENTION/CONTROL:

1. Minnesota state law requires that all children entering kindergarten be vaccinated against pertussis (along with tetanus and diphtheria). Exceptions are made for children who are in the process of completing a series or have a legal exemption. (See current Minnesota immunization law). Pertussis vaccine is not currently given to children over 7 years of age.
2. If your child develops the symptoms described above within 20 days after last contact with the infected child, keep your child at home and call your healthcare provider. If you have children under age 7 at home, check to see that they are up to date on their DTaP vaccinations.
3. Call your healthcare provider if you or your child have been exposed to pertussis because you may need to receive preventive antibiotic treatment.

For more information, you or your healthcare provider may call Hennepin County Community Health Department at (952) 351-5230, or call your local health department.