

Parents Can Protect Their Babies from Pertussis

Keep your child and yourself safe. By getting all vaccines on time, you and your child can be protected from many vaccine preventable diseases over your lifetimes. Immunizations have saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

What is pertussis?

- Pertussis (whooping cough) is a very serious bacterial disease of the respiratory (breathing) system.
- The germs are spread easily by infected people when they cough, sneeze or have close contact with others.
- Once a person has had pertussis, they **do not get** life-long protection against the disease. They can get the disease again even if they received antibiotics or have had the vaccine.

What are signs and symptoms of pertussis?

- Early symptoms of pertussis are sneezing, a runny nose, a fever and a cough.
- Over time, the cough gets worse, leading to severe coughing spells (sometimes with a whooping sound before the next breath is taken). The cough can last up to 2 months and makes it very hard to breathe.
- Young babies may not have the same symptoms and parents and caregivers may not realize how sick their baby really is.

Babies are most at risk.

- All young children, especially babies, can quickly become very sick when they have pertussis.
- They have trouble breathing and can develop serious complications like pneumonia (infection of the lungs), convulsions (seizures) and permanent brain damage.
- Babies can die from pertussis, even if they are treated with antibiotics or hospitalized.

Protect yourself and your baby.

- Preventing pertussis in parents is an important way to protect their babies against pertussis. A parent can spread pertussis germs to their baby, even before the parent starts to show signs of infection.
- Pregnant women who have never had a pertussis vaccine as an adult should get the vaccine in their third trimester from their healthcare provider.

- Additional pertussis vaccine recommendations may be recommended if a local pertussis outbreak is declared.
- The vaccine is safe to receive during pregnancy and when breastfeeding.
- All parents, extended family members and caregivers are recommended to get the pertussis vaccine in order to protect their baby.
- Fathers, extended family members and caregivers may get immunized before or after the baby's birth.
- The vaccine is given as an injection in the upper arm. Common mild side effects last 1-2 days and include soreness, swelling or redness at the injection site. These side effects will not prevent you from caring for the baby.
- Contact the nearest Public Health office for information about getting your pertussis immunization.

Get your baby immunized on time!

- **It is very important that parents start their baby's immunizations at 2 months of age to protect them against serious diseases like pertussis.**

Get medical attention immediately!

- If you or your baby is sick or you think that you or your baby has been exposed to someone who has pertussis, see a doctor or nurse practitioner as soon as possible.
- Early testing and treatment with antibiotics may prevent serious disease and reduce the risks of complications from pertussis.
- For more information contact your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner or HealthLine at 811.