



Fact Sheet

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

What is pertussis?

- An infection caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.
- Pertussis is a very serious disease in infants under 12 months of age. It can lead to breathing difficulties, hospitalization and sometimes death even with treatment.

How does a person get pertussis?

- The bacteria are spread by direct contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person.
- The bacteria spreads easily when people are in close contact as in households, classrooms, and child care centers.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Symptoms usually develop 7 to 10 days after a person has become infected but can occur anywhere from 5 to 21 days later.
- The first signs of illness are usually a runny nose and an irritating cough, similar to the common cold.
- Within days, the cough becomes more frequent and severe, often occurring in attacks. The cough can last 6 to 10 weeks.
- The coughing attack may end with vomiting and/or shortness of breath.
- A characteristic “whoop” at the end of the coughing spell is common in children under one year of age.

How is pertussis diagnosed & treated?

- Early diagnosis and treatment is important to stop the spread.
- A special swab inserted inside the nose is used to test for pertussis. A throat swab is not appropriate.
- Treatment with an appropriate antibiotic (Azithromycin, Clarithromycin, Erythromycin) is

needed. After 5 full days of antibiotics, a person is considered not infectious.

- Watch for signs and symptoms, and see a doctor for early diagnosis and treatment.
- A person with symptoms may continue to attend school, work, child care facility or activity group unless:
 - there is a child under one year of age in attendance **or**
 - there is a pregnant woman in the last three months of pregnancy in attendance (in a school setting this means the teacher in the same class as the case).
- Household contacts **with symptoms** should be treated.
- Household contacts who **do not have symptoms** and are living with someone under 12 months of age or in her last 3 months of pregnancy, should be treated to protect the infant/newborn.
- Close contacts under 12 months of age or who are in the last 3 months of pregnancy and **do not have symptoms** should be assessed by a doctor.

How is pertussis prevented?

- Ensure immunization is complete. In Saskatchewan, pertussis immunization is routinely offered, free of charge, at 2, 4, 6 & 18 months, 4 to 6 years and in grade 8.
- Adults can receive a booster once. Pertussis vaccine is also available for pregnant women after 26 weeks of age to help protect newborn infants.

For more information, contact your local public health nurse or call HealthLine at 811.
If you have technical issues by dialing 811, you can call 1-877-800-0002 to be connected with Healthline.