

# Fact Sheet: Pertussis

## What is Pertussis?

Pertussis is a very contagious disease of the respiratory tract. Pertussis is also known as “whooping cough” due to the “whoop” sound made when the infected person tries to breathe after hard coughing and choking spells. Children younger than 6 months of age may not have the strength to have a “whoop”. Pertussis can affect anyone, but it can be very serious and even deadly, for babies less than a year old. A vaccine is available to help prevent acquiring Pertussis.

## Signs and Symptoms

Early symptoms can last for one to two weeks and usually include:

- Runny nose
- Low-grade fever (generally minimal throughout the course of the disease)
- Mild, occasional cough
- Apnea – a pause in breathing (in infants)

As the disease progresses, the traditional symptoms of Pertussis appear and include:

- Paroxysms (fits) of many, rapid coughs followed by a high-pitched "whoop"
- Vomiting
- Exhaustion (very tired) after coughing fits

The coughing fits can go on for up to 10 weeks or more if not treated with antibiotics.

## How is it spread?

Pertussis is a very contagious disease only found in humans and is spread from person to person. People with Pertussis usually spread the disease by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the Pertussis bacteria. Many infants who get Pertussis are infected by older siblings, parents or caregivers who might not even know they have the disease.

## Treatment

Pertussis is generally treated with antibiotics and early treatment is very important. Treatment may make your infection less severe if it is started early, before coughing fits begin. Treatment can also help prevent spreading the disease to close contacts (people who have spent a lot of time around the infected person) and is necessary for stopping the spread of Pertussis.

## Prevention

The best way to prevent Pertussis (whooping cough) among infants, children, teens, and adults is to get vaccinated. Keep infants and other people at high risk for Pertussis complications away from infected people.

For children under 7 years:

The DTaP vaccine includes protection against Pertussis. Infants should get 5 doses of this vaccine; they need their first dose at 2 months of age. Additional doses are given at 4 months, 6 months, between 12–18 months and 4–6 years of age.

For 10 to 64 year-olds:

A new vaccine called Tdap is available. Teens and adults need a booster of vaccine because the protection they had as a child is mostly gone.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: [www.cdc.gov/pertussis](http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis)  
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