

# Pertussis Questions & Answers

## What is pertussis?

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a respiratory infection caused by bacteria. It spreads easily and can be dangerous for babies and young children. A common symptom of pertussis is severe coughing fits, with a "whooping" sound when breathing in.

## How long until signs and symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually start 7-10 days after exposure to the bacteria, with a range of 4-21 days. People with pertussis are most contagious during the first two weeks after coughing begins.

## How is pertussis spread?

Pertussis is mainly spread through germs left in the air when a sick person coughs or sneezes. Close contact with a sick person, especially in crowded areas with low air flow, can increase the risk of getting sick.

## Who is at risk of pertussis?

Pertussis can affect people of all ages, but certain groups have a higher risk of getting sick:

- Infants younger than 6 months old, who are more vulnerable to severe illness and complications
- Pregnant women, especially those in the third trimester, and their newborns
- People with compromised immune systems
- Those who have not been vaccinated fully or at all

## What are the typical symptoms of pertussis?

- Coughing fits (often followed by a "whooping" sound while breathing in)
- Vomiting
- Fatigue (exhaustion)
- Mild fever

For more information on pertussis, visit:

- About Whooping Cough (CDC): [www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about](http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about)
- Pertussis (Whooping Cough): [www.immunize.org/wp-content/uploads/catg.d/p4212.pdf](http://www.immunize.org/wp-content/uploads/catg.d/p4212.pdf)
- Pertussis (Whooping Cough): [health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease\\_listing/pertussis/](http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease_listing/pertussis/)

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## What is the treatment for pertussis?

Pertussis can be treated with antibiotics (medicines that kill bacteria or make it hard for them to grow). Post-exposure prophylaxis and vaccination are also important for treatment and prevention. Ask your doctor for more information.

## How is pertussis diagnosed?

Diagnosis of pertussis is primarily based on whether or not a person has symptoms and is confirmed through laboratory testing.

## Is pertussis vaccine effective?

Yes, pertussis vaccines do a good job of preventing sickness.

Vaccines can also make symptoms less severe if sickness occurs. However, vaccine strength may lower over time, and it's important to get a booster shot for continued protection.

## What should I do if I suspect that I or someone else has pertussis?

If you think you or someone else has pertussis, see your doctor immediately. Book a visit with your doctor for testing and treatment.

Follow your doctor's recommendations, wear a mask, and cover your cough/sneeze with a tissue to help stop the spread.

## How can pertussis be prevented?

Pertussis prevention depends on a combination of vaccination, maintaining good respiratory hygiene, and seeking immediate care for symptoms:

- Routine childhood vaccination with the DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis) vaccine.
- Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis) booster vaccination for adolescents and adults, including pregnant women.
- Vaccination of healthcare workers.
- If you test positive for pertussis, avoid close contact with others for 21 days if you have not received treatment, or for 5 days if you have received treatment.
- Practicing respiratory hygiene, including covering coughs and sneezes with tissues, and frequent handwashing.
- Sanitizing high-touched surfaces.

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- Pertussis (Whooping Cough): [www.immunize.org/wp-content/uploads/catg.d/p4212.pdf](http://www.immunize.org/wp-content/uploads/catg.d/p4212.pdf)
- Pertussis (Whooping Cough): [health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease\\_listing/pertussis/](http://health.hawaii.gov/docd/disease_listing/pertussis/)