

Pertussis

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.

How is pertussis spread?

Pertussis is spread mainly when infected people cough or sneeze, expelling droplets that contain the bacteria.

Who gets pertussis?

Pertussis can occur at any age but severe illness is more common in young children who have not been immunized. Young infants are at highest risk for life-threatening complications. Older children, adolescents, and adults who have been immunized often have mild symptoms.

Should adults be concerned about pertussis?

It is important to consider a diagnosis of pertussis in older children, adolescents, and adults with persistent coughs if they have close, frequent contact with infants and young children.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Initially, pertussis begins as a mild upper respiratory infection that resembles a common cold. Symptoms include sneezing, runny nose, low-grade fever and a mild cough. This stage may last 7 – 10 days. The second stage is characterized by cough which becomes more severe. In children, the cough is characterized by episodes of many rapid coughs followed by a crowing or high pitched whoop. The second stage can last up to 10 weeks. The third stage is a gradual recovery where the cough eventually disappears. This stage can last 2-3 weeks.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually begin seven to ten days after exposure but can appear in as few as five or as many as 21 days.

How is pertussis treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat pertussis. After five days of treatment, a person is no longer contagious even if he or she is still coughing.

What can be done to prevent pertussis?

The best way to prevent pertussis is to be vaccinated. Tdap is a tetanus vaccine combined with a pertussis vaccine. Adults need at least one Tdap to protect against pertussis. Other measures to prevent the spread of pertussis include the following:

- Practice proper cough hygiene
 - + Cough or sneeze into a tissue or shirt sleeve – throw used tissues in trash
- Wash hands frequently with soap and water, especially after coughing
- Don't touch your eyes, nose, or mouth – germs spread this way.

What should I do if I have Pertussis-like symptoms?

- Contact your personal physician, the Student Health Center, or the Faculty & Staff Clinic (call first to make an appointment and advise them of your symptoms)
- Stay home and self-isolate until you can be treated.
- Stay away from young children, infants, and persons with a weakened immune system

If you would like to read more about pertussis, please visit a reliable web site like the Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov or the Alabama Department of Public Health at www.adph.org.