

Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

What is whooping cough?

Pertussis is a respiratory infection caused by bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. It is also called whooping cough because of the characteristic sound of the cough it causes.

The illness usually begins with a runny nose, mild cough, and pink eyes that last about a week. Then an increasingly severe cough develops that can last 2 to 4 weeks. The cough usually comes in spasms and ends with a high-pitched whoop. Often the coughing causes a child to vomit or his or her face to turn blue. During the coughing phase, children with whooping cough do not have a fever. In infants, whooping cough is a very serious illness and may require them to be hospitalized.

What is the treatment?

Antibiotics

Your child's antibiotic is _____. Your child's dose is _____ given _____ times a day during waking hours for _____ days.

Coughing spasms

Warm apple juice or tea may help break the coughing spasms and is soothing to your child. A humidifier in your child's room may also help. (The humidifier must be cleaned every 2 to 3 days.) Gentle suction with a bulb syringe and saline water may be used to get rid of thick secretions in the nose and throat.

Fluids

Encourage your child to drink lots of clear fluids to prevent the mucus in the lungs from becoming sticky.

Avoidance of cough triggers

Keep your children away from things that trigger coughing, such as tobacco smoke, perfumes, or pollutants.

Care of exposed persons

All people in close contact with your child will be asked to take an antibiotic for 14 days. This includes people in your immediate household and any day care contacts your child may have.

How can whooping cough be prevented?

It is important to have your child immunized against all preventable illnesses, including whooping cough, at their regularly scheduled health checkups. Some parents have concerns about the neurologic side effects of the pertussis vaccine. It must be remembered that pertussis is a dangerous disease, especially for infants. Complications can include pneumonia, seizures and death. A newer vaccine for pertussis is now being used and the incidence of a serious

reaction is less than with the previous vaccine. The risk of having neurologic problems or long term damage from the vaccine is very low.

When should I call the doctor?

Call **IMMEDIATELY** if:

- Coughing spasms cause your child's face, hands, or feet to turn blue
- Your child stops breathing with any coughing spells
- Your child's breathing becomes fast or difficult
- Your child has a seizure
- Your child is not responding to you or seems lethargic (sluggish)
- Your child is not drinking
- Your child develops a fever higher than 104 F (40 C)
- Your child starts to act very sick

Call **within 24 hours** if:

- Your child is less than 6 months old and has coughing spasms
- Your child has been exposed to someone with whooping cough
- Your child gets a fever
- Your child's cough lasts longer than 3 weeks
- You have other questions or concerns