

Pertussis- Whooping Cough

As you may be aware, there has been a sustained increase in the number of persons diagnosed with pertussis in Fresno County. Pertussis, also known as “whooping cough”, is a bacterial disease that causes severe coughing. The name “whooping cough” comes from the characteristic “whoop” often heard in infected children when they try to breathe after a coughing episode. People with pertussis may experience continuous coughing spells in rapid succession and these can sometimes be followed by vomiting. Children who have symptoms of this illness should stay at home to avoid spreading it to other school aged children.

Pertussis is spread from person to person in tiny droplets containing the bacteria when they talk, cough, or sneeze. It often starts like a common cold, with runny nose, slight fever, and cough which worsens over 1-2 weeks and can last 1-2 months. The spread of pertussis can be minimized by covering coughs with a tissue, washing hands with soap and water after coughing or sneezing, and keeping your child home and consulting with your health care provider when he/she is sick. Infants and very young children are most at risk for severe illness and even death from pertussis infection. All young children should be immunized against pertussis and kept up-to-date with their childhood vaccinations.

By age seven, children should have received five doses of DTaP vaccine which completes an initial series of protection against pertussis. However the vaccine lasts only 5 to 10 years and may start to wear off by the time a child is in junior high or high school. Therefore, older children or adults can get pertussis even if they were vaccinated as a child.

Fortunately, there are vaccines available for older children 10 -18 years of age that may help reduce your child’s risk of getting sick with pertussis. For children in this age group, there are two new booster vaccines available through your doctor, BOOSTRIX® and ADACEL®. Talk with your doctor to determine if your child should receive a booster, or if there are any other actions you should take to avoid pertussis.

