

Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

Definition:

Pertussis also called whooping cough, is a serious bacterial infection of the lining of the breathing passages, particularly in the windpipe area. It is caused by *Bordetella pertussis* bacteria and is extremely contagious. Anyone can get whooping cough, but it is more common in infants and children. It's especially dangerous in infants. The coughing spells can be so bad that it is hard for infants to eat, drink, or breathe. The best way to prevent whooping cough is with the pertussis vaccine, which doctors often give in combination with vaccines against two other serious diseases — diphtheria and tetanus. DTaP is the vaccine for infants and young children. Tdap is the vaccine for older children and adults.

Symptoms:

Once you become infected with whooping cough, it takes about seven to 10 days for signs and symptoms to appear, though it can sometimes take longer. They're usually mild at first and resemble those of a common cold:

- Runny nose
- Nasal congestion
- Red, watery eyes (conjunctivitis)
- Fever
- Cough

After a week or two, signs and symptoms worsen. Thick mucus accumulates inside your airways, causing uncontrollable coughing. Severe and prolonged coughing attacks may:

- Provoke vomiting
- Result in a red or blue face
- Cause extreme fatigue
- End with a high-pitched "whoop" sound during the next breath of air

However, many people don't develop the characteristic whoop. Sometimes, a persistent hacking cough is the only sign that an adolescent or adult has whooping cough.

Infants may not cough at all. Instead, they may struggle to breathe, or they may even temporarily stop breathing.

Transmission:

When you cough or sneeze, you can spread tiny respiratory droplets containing the bacteria into the air. People around you may inhale these bacteria-containing droplets and get infected. You may be contagious even before symptoms appear and remain contagious for up to two weeks after coughing starts.

Treatment:

- Rest
- Drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Use a cool-mist humidifier to soothe your lungs and loosen mucus in your respiratory tract.
- Take the antibiotics prescribed by your doctor.
- Don't take cough medicine unless recommended by your doctor.
- Keep your home free from irritants such as smoke and dust that may trigger coughing fits.

N.B: Treatment is based on antibiotic therapy, which may also be prescribed to other members of an infected person's household to prevent the spread of infection. The infected person should be isolated for five days after starting antibiotic therapy.