



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Pertussis

(whooping cough)

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a highly contagious bacterial disease caused by *Bordetella pertussis*, which is found in the mouth, nose, and throat of an infected person. You can get pertussis at any age, but most people with pertussis are children under 5 years old. The disease is most serious in infants and children of preschool age.

How do you get it?

You get pertussis by breathing in airborne droplets containing the bacteria. The droplets are created when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or talks.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Pertussis usually begins with mild flu-like symptoms that include a runny nose, sneezing, mild fever, and a slight cough. The cough worsens over about 2 weeks, until the patient has violent fits of coughing (cough paroxysms). The episodes of violent coughing can be severe enough that the patient has problems catching his/her breath and there may be a "whooping sound" that gives the disease its name. Infants under 6 months old and adults often do not make this distinctive whooping sound. Infants and children appear very ill. Vomiting and exhaustion commonly follow coughing fits. The symptoms of whooping cough are generally much milder in adults and teens, and in children who have not had all of the recommended pertussis shots.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually start within 7 to 10 days after exposure to someone with pertussis and usually last for 1 to 6 weeks.

For how long is a person contagious?

A person with pertussis is contagious from the beginning of the earliest symptoms to about 2 weeks after the beginning of the coughing fits. However,

the infectious period can be shortened by taking medicines as prescribed by a doctor or by the Health Department.

What is the treatment for pertussis?

Hospital care may be necessary for young infants. Medicine should be taken for 14 days to treat pertussis. All household and close contacts of a person with pertussis should also take the medication to keep from getting or spreading the illness to others.

Is there a vaccine for pertussis?

Yes. The pertussis vaccine is given together with diphtheria and tetanus vaccines in a combination shot called DTaP. The newly licensed Tdap vaccine may be given to children 11-18 years of age. Immunization with pertussis vaccine may not always give complete or permanent protection. A course of antibiotics is recommended for household or close contacts of a pertussis case, regardless of whether they have received the vaccine.

Should a person with pertussis be excluded from work or school?

Yes! A person with pertussis can be considered noninfectious only after they have taken antibiotics for at least 5 days of the 14-day recommended course.

How can you keep from getting pertussis?

The best way to keep from getting it is to get vaccinated.

If a close contact or someone in your household has pertussis, take the medication as recommended by your doctor or the Health Department.

For more information, see the CDC's website at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/pertussis_t.htm