



Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

What is pertussis?

- An infection caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.
- Pertussis is a very serious disease in infants under 12 months of age. It can lead to breathing difficulties, hospitalization and sometimes death even with treatment.

How does a person get pertussis?

- The bacteria are spread by direct contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person.
- The bacteria spreads easily when people are in close contact as in households, classrooms, and child care centers.

What are the signs and symptoms?

- Symptoms usually develop 7 to 10 days after a person has become infected but can occur anywhere from 5 to 21 days later.
- The first signs of illness are usually a runny nose and an irritating cough, similar to the common cold.
- Within days, the cough becomes more frequent and severe, often occurring in attacks. The cough can last 6 to 10 weeks.
- The coughing attack may end with vomiting and/or shortness of breath.
- A characteristic “whoop” at the end of the coughing spell is common in children under one year of age.

How is pertussis diagnosed & treated?

- Early diagnosis and treatment is important to stop the spread.
- A special swab inserted inside the nose is used to test for pertussis. A throat swab is not appropriate.
- Treatment with an appropriate antibiotic (Azithromycin, Clarithromycin, Erythromycin) is needed. After 5 full days of antibiotics, a person is considered not infectious.

How is pertussis prevented?

- Ensure immunization is complete. In Saskatchewan, pertussis immunization is routinely offered, free of charge, at 2, 4, 6 & 18 months, 4 to 6 years and in grade 8.
- Pertussis vaccine is available for primary caregivers of infants born on April 1, 2010 or later. Primary caregivers qualify for free vaccine if he/she is a routine (daily) caregiver of infant and/or sleep in the same room as an infant less than 6 months of age
- Watch for signs and symptoms, and see a doctor for early diagnosis and treatment.
- A person with symptoms may continue to attend school, work, child care facility or activity group unless:
 - There is a child under one year of age in attendance **or**
 - There is a pregnant woman in the last three months of pregnancy in attendance (in a school setting this means the teacher in the same class as the case).
- Household contacts **with symptoms** should be treated.
- Household contacts who **do not have symptoms** and are living with someone under 12 months of age or in her last 3 months of pregnancy, should be treated to protect the infant/newborn.
- Close contacts under 12 months of age or who are in the last 3 months of pregnancy and **do not have symptoms** should be assessed by a doctor.

For more information, contact your doctor or
Population and Public Health,
Disease Control at **306-655-4612**
