

Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough is a lung infection. It is called whooping cough because of the whooping sound of your breathing after you have had several coughs. It is also called pertussis.

Adults can usually recover from whooping cough, but it is a very dangerous disease for babies. Complications of whooping cough can include pneumonia, seizures, and death.

What is the cause?

Whooping cough is caused by bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. You can get infected by breathing in the bacteria from someone who is sneezing or coughing. When teens or adults have whooping cough, it's usually a mild coldlike illness, so they don't know they are carrying the bacteria and passing it on to babies and children.

What are the symptoms?

The first symptoms are usually a runny nose, mild cough, and pink eyes. The cough may linger for a few weeks. The younger you are, the more severe the infection is likely to be. The cough can get worse and worse. It may cause vomiting. Your face may turn red or blue. Coughing spells are usually worse at night. Babies may have spells of not breathing.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. Your provider may get a sample of mucus from your nose to test for bacteria.

How is it treated?

Your healthcare provider will prescribe antibiotic medicine to kill the bacteria causing the infection. If you start taking an antibiotic early in the infection, it may shorten the course of the illness and prevent severe symptoms. However, in most cases the antibiotic will keep you from spreading the infection to others, but you will keep having a cough for a couple weeks.

Everyone in close contact with you will be asked to take an antibiotic to keep them from getting sick or passing the bacteria to others. This includes the people you live with.

How can I help take care of myself?

- **If you smoke, stop.** If someone else in your household smokes, ask them to smoke outside. Avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.
- Get plenty of rest.
- If the air in your bedroom is dry, a cool-mist humidifier can moisten the air and help make breathing easier. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning the humidifier often so that bacteria and mold cannot grow. You can also try running hot water in the shower or bathtub to steam up the bathroom. Sit in the steamy bathroom for 10 to 15 minutes if you are coughing hard or having trouble breathing.
- Unless your healthcare provider has told you differently, drink plenty of liquids to help loosen mucus and make it easier to cough it up. It can also help to drink warm liquids such as soup or hot apple juice.
- Cough syrup is usually not helpful and is not recommended.
- Stay away from things that trigger coughing, such as smoke, perfumes, or pollutants.
- Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. Ask your provider:
 - How and when you will hear your test results
 - How long it will take for you to recover
 - What activities you should avoid and when you can return to normal activities
 - How to take care of yourself at home
 - What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them
- Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

How can I help prevent whooping cough?

The pertussis vaccine protects against whooping cough and is included in children's tetanus shots, starting at 2 months of age. Babies should get 3 pertussis shots during their first year of life, followed by booster shots as they get older.

Teens and adults should get a new type of tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis booster called a Tdap shot, starting at age 11 or 12. Adults should get a Tdap shot once even if they are not yet due for their 10-year tetanus update. This will "boost" any protection they still have from their childhood vaccinations. Getting vaccinated with Tdap is especially important for families expecting a baby.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the Tdap shot for pregnant women if they have not had it before. They should get it after the 20th week of pregnancy, preferably during the last trimester of pregnancy (weeks 27 to 40). This will give the baby some protection against whooping cough before the baby gets the recommended shots.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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