

Pertussis “Whooping Cough” Disease

Keep your child and yourself safe. By getting all vaccines on time, you and your child can be protected from many vaccine preventable diseases over your lifetimes. Immunizations have saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

What is pertussis?

- Pertussis, or “whooping cough”, is a serious and highly contagious infection of the lungs and throat caused by *Bordetella pertussis* bacteria.
- Young children who have not been immunized get sicker than older children and adults.
- On average, one to three deaths occur due to pertussis in Canada. **Saskatchewan had three deaths from pertussis between 2010 – 2015.**
- People can get pertussis at any age. People can get pertussis many times during their life, as they do not develop permanent immunity. Disease may occur in those who have been vaccinated but symptoms are typically milder.

Serious complications of pertussis happen most often in infants and may include:

- Apnea (breathing stops)
- Pneumonia
- Convulsions or seizures
- Encephalopathy (brain damage) that may be permanent.

What are the symptoms?

- Pertussis starts like a common cold with symptoms such as sneezing, runny nose, mild fever and a mild cough.
- During the next week or two, the cough gets worse, leading to severe coughing spells that often end with a whooping sound before the next breath, especially in young children.
- Teenagers and adults may not make the whooping sound.
- The cough can last one to two months and occurs more often at night. The cough can make a person gag or spit out mucus, and make it hard to take a breath. This prevents enough oxygen from getting to the brain.

How is pertussis spread?

- **Early diagnosis and treatment is important to stop the spread of the pertussis bacteria.**
- A person with pertussis who does not get treatment can spread the germ to others for up to three weeks after the cough starts.
- Pertussis spreads easily when an infected person coughs, sneezes or has close contact with others.
- By sharing food, drinks or cigarettes, or kissing someone who carries the bacteria can also put you at risk.

Is there a treatment?

Pertussis is treated with antibiotics, which help to reduce the spread of infection and the duration of illness when given during the very early stage of the illness.

People at high risk of serious illness who have been in close contact with someone with pertussis are given an antibiotic to prevent the disease. This includes infants younger than one year old and pregnant women in their last three months of pregnancy, as well as all of their household and daycare contacts.

People who have pertussis or who may have been exposed to pertussis **should not** have any contact with babies or young children until they have been properly tested and/or treated for pertussis. **If you have been in contact with a person who has pertussis, you should call your doctor, nurse practitioner or local health office for more information.**

Pertussis containing vaccines

Pertussis containing vaccines are part of the routine childhood immunization program (2 months of age to Grade 8). An adult immunization program is now available as well.

Ask your public health nurse, nurse practitioner or doctor for more information about this vaccine.