

# PERTUSSIS

## “WHOOPIING COUGH”

### What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a highly contagious vaccine-preventable disease that **can occur at any age**. It is very serious in babies and young children, especially for newborns because they cannot be vaccinated until they are at least two months old.

### What are the symptoms?

**Whooping cough starts with mild symptoms similar to a cold - a runny nose or congestion, sneezing and a mild cough or fever. Symptoms get worse after a week or two, they can include:**

- **Rapid and deep coughing fits**
- **A “whoop” at the end of coughing**
- **Vomiting after coughing**
- **Coughing is worse at night**
- **Apnea (periods of not breathing) in babies**

These symptoms will start about 10 days after a person has been exposed to the bacteria but could appear up to 20 days later. The symptoms can last for 6-10 weeks. Although most people recover from the disease, some people can be very ill. Pneumonia and seizures can happen. **Illness is generally milder for people who have been vaccinated.**

### How is it spread?

Whooping cough is spread from person to person by drops of fluid from the nose and throat of someone who has the disease.

### When should I get healthcare?

If symptoms worsen (as explained above) you are encouraged to see a healthcare provider or call 811. Also, if you are pregnant or have an infant (under 1 years old) AND in close contact with someone with whooping cough, you should talk to a healthcare provider.

### How is it treated?

Pertussis is treated with an antibiotic prescribed by your healthcare provider. Antibiotics make a person no longer infectious. When taken early, antibiotics can also decrease symptoms. They are less likely to help with coughing symptoms if started more than three weeks from when the cough begins. Some infants, children and adults who are in contact with the person with pertussis may also need to take an antibiotic (preventative treatment).

### How can it be prevented?

The best way to prevent getting whooping cough and giving it to others is to make sure you are up to date with your vaccines and booster doses. Other ways to prevent illness are to:

- Stay home if you are sick, if possible.
- Wash your hands often with water and soap, or hand sanitizer.
- Don't share drinking glasses, water bottles or eating utensils.
- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or forearm.

Updated November 2025

## Vaccines protecting against pertussis

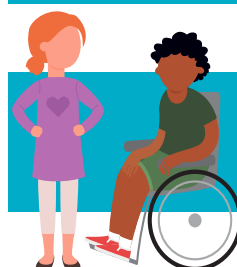
There are two vaccines that help protect against pertussis: DTaP and Tdap. Both also protect against diphtheria and tetanus and are used at different ages.

These vaccines are **free** and available through primary care providers and Public Health.

One dose of  
DTaP-IPV-Hib at  
2, 4, 6 & 18 months



One dose of Tdap-IPV  
between ages 4 & 7



One dose of Tdap  
between ages 12 & 18

*Offered in grade 7 as part of the  
School Immunization Program*



One dose of Tdap in every  
pregnancy *(to protect your  
newborn)*



One dose of Tdap in  
adulthood, 10 years  
after last tetanus-  
containing vaccine



To check your family's vaccination records, visit:

[vaxrecordns.nshealth.ca](http://vaxrecordns.nshealth.ca)

For more information on pertussis, visit:

[www.nshealth.ca/pertussis](http://www.nshealth.ca/pertussis)



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