

Facts about Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Pertussis (whooping cough) is caused by bacteria. The infection usually starts with a runny nose and cough. Children with whooping cough don't usually have a fever. Soon the cough worsens. The child may need to take a big breath and may make a "whoop" sound. The attack of coughing may last so long that the child becomes blue in the face and may vomit. It takes a long time for children to get over whooping cough; they may be sick for 6 to 10 weeks.

Infants and younger children with whooping cough are at high risk of complications, such as seizures, pneumonia, or dehydration. In infants, whooping cough can even be life-threatening.

It usually takes 7 to 10 days to get sick with whooping cough after coming into contact with someone who has it, but may take as long as 21 days.

Prevention and Treatment

Whooping cough can be treated with antibiotics; antibiotics help a person recover, if taken very early in the illness. If taken later, antibiotics can help prevent the spread of bacteria that cause whooping cough.

People who are in close contact with someone with whooping cough and who are at high risk can also take antibiotics.

People at high risk from whooping cough include infants less than 1 year of age and pregnant women in the last 3 months of pregnancy. To protect those at high risk, all household and child care centre contacts of a case of whooping cough receive antibiotics, if there is a child less than 1 year of age or a pregnant woman in the last 3 months of pregnancy in the household or the child care centre.

How is Whooping Cough Spread?

Whooping cough is spread in droplets coughed, sneezed or breathed into the air by someone with whooping cough or by direct contact with the fluids from the nose and throat of someone with whooping cough.

People with whooping cough spread the disease from the time they get the infection until three weeks after coughing starts. Infants who have not been immunized may be infectious for up to 6 weeks after the cough begins.

Whooping cough is a reportable disease in British Columbia. The child care centre or school must report a case of whooping cough to the local Community Health Centre.

What to Do at Home

- If another child has whooping cough, check that your child has had all their pertussis shots.
- If your child has not had pertussis vaccine, call your local Community Health Centre or doctor to arrange for the shots.
- Call your doctor if you think your child has whooping cough.
- If your child has whooping cough, tell the child care centre or school.
- When taking care of a child with whooping cough, wash your hands often and always before preparing and eating food.
- **Do not give over-the counter cough and cold medicines to a child under 6 years of age, unless your doctor tells you to.**
- If your doctor prescribes medicine for your child or for others in the household, make sure they take all the medicine, even if they begin to feel better.



Children with whooping cough should not return to the child care centre or school until 5 days after they begin treatment with antibiotics and only when they feel well enough to take part in activities.



WHOOPIING COUGH is a vaccine-preventable disease

Children who are immunized against pertussis (whooping cough) usually do not get the disease. Pertussis vaccine is offered as part of routine immunizations in BC.