



## Pertussis (Whooping Cough) – What You Need To Know



**Pertussis (whooping cough) is very contagious and can cause serious illness—especially in infants who are too young to be fully vaccinated. Make sure your infants and young children get their recommended five shots on time. Adolescent and adult vaccination is also important, especially for families with new infants.**




Pertussis (whooping cough) is a very contagious disease caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. Among vaccine-preventable diseases, pertussis is one of the most commonly occurring ones in the United States.

There is high vaccine coverage for children nationwide. However, protection from the childhood vaccine fades over time. Adolescents and adults need to be revaccinated, even if they were completely vaccinated as children.

Also, pertussis vaccines are very effective but not 100% effective. If pertussis is circulating in the community, there is still a chance that a fully vaccinated person can catch this very contagious disease. When you or your child develops a cold that includes a prolonged or severe cough, it may be pertussis. The best way to know is to contact your doctor.

## Would You Know Pertussis?

Hear  
the cough   
([http://health.utah.gov/epi/diseases/pertussis/pertussis\\_sounds.htm](http://health.utah.gov/epi/diseases/pertussis/pertussis_sounds.htm))



## Pertussis Symptoms

Pertussis can cause serious illness in infants, children and adults. The disease starts like the common cold, with runny nose or congestion, sneezing, and maybe mild cough or fever. But after 1–2 weeks, severe coughing begins. Infants and children with the disease cough violently and rapidly, over and over, until the air is gone from their lungs and they're forced to inhale with a loud "whooping" sound. Pertussis is most severe for babies; more than half of infants less than 1 year of age who get the disease must be hospitalized. About 1 in 20 infants with pertussis get pneumonia (lung infection), and about 1 in 100 will have convulsions. In rare cases, pertussis can be deadly, especially in infants.

## How Pertussis Spreads

People with pertussis usually spread the disease by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the pertussis bacteria. Many infants who get pertussis are infected by parents, older siblings, or other caregivers who might not even know they have the disease.

## Pertussis in the United States

Since the 1980s, there's been an increase in the number of cases of pertussis, especially among teens (10–19 years of age) and babies less than 6 months of age. In 2008 there were more than 13,000 reported cases including 18 deaths from pertussis nationally.

## Preventing Pertussis



The best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated. In the US, the recommended pertussis vaccine for children is called DTaP. This is a safe and effective combination vaccine that protects children against three diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis. For maximum

protection against pertussis, children need five DTaP shots. The first three shots are given at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. The fourth shot is given between 15 and 18 months of age, and a fifth shot is given when a child enters school, at 4–6 years of age. Parents can also help protect infants by keeping them away as much as possible from anyone who has cold symptoms or is coughing.

Vaccine protection for pertussis, tetanus, and diphtheria can fade with time. Before 2005, the only booster vaccine available contained tetanus and diphtheria (called Td), and was recommended for adolescents and adults every 10 years. Today there are boosters for adolescents and adults that contain tetanus, diphtheria, *and* pertussis (called Tdap). Pre-teens going to the doctor for their regular check-up at age 11 or 12 years should get a dose of Tdap. Adults who didn't get Tdap as a pre-teen or teen should get one dose of Tdap instead of the Td booster. Most pregnant women who were not previously vaccinated with Tdap should get one dose of Tdap postpartum before leaving the hospital or birthing center. Getting vaccinated with Tdap is especially important for families with and caregivers of new infants.

The easiest thing for adults to do is to get Tdap instead of their next regular tetanus booster—that Td shot that they were supposed to get every 10 years. The dose of Tdap can be given earlier than the 10-year mark, so it's a good idea for adults to talk to a healthcare provider about what's best for their specific situation.

## More Information

- [Pertussis \(Whooping Cough\) Vaccination \(http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/default.htm\)](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/default.htm)
- [Pertussis Disease – Questions & Answers \(http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/dis-faqs.htm\)](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/dis-faqs.htm)
- [Hear What Pertussis Sounds Like !\[\]\(79de0df6c6ddd2d4eb74f1cc5f48ec50\_img.jpg\) \(http://health.utah.gov/epi/diseases/pertussis/pertussis\\_sounds.htm\)](http://health.utah.gov/epi/diseases/pertussis/pertussis_sounds.htm)
- [Downloadable podcast, Pertussis Vaccine Recommendation for Adolescents \[PODCAST - 4:22 minutes\] \(http://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=9957\)](http://www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=9957)
- [Video for healthcare providers, Pertussis: Recognition and Treatment !\[\]\(d4c9768318b38eff1042b07478e20b4c\_img.jpg\) \(http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/713708\)](http://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/713708) (CDC Expert Commentary in Partnership with Medscape: 3:36 minutes)

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