



PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH) FACT SHEET

What is Pertussis?

Pertussis (also known as whooping cough) is a highly contagious disease caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. Currently in Australia most people suffering from pertussis are adolescents or adults. Pertussis is particularly serious in children under two years of age in whom hospitalisation is often necessary. **Infants under six months of age are most at risk of serious complications resulting from the disease.**

What are the symptoms?

Pertussis usually begins like a normal cold with a runny nose, tiredness and sometimes a fever, or the person may simply begin coughing. Bouts of severe, repetitive coughing often occur followed by a big deep gasp after each bout. After several days the bursts of coughing may cause the person to vomit or to lose their breath. Sometimes a high-pitched crowing ('whoop') is heard when the person is breathing in between coughs however infants less than six months old and some adults may not make this 'whooping' sound. The coughing can last up to three months even after antibiotic treatment. Some people who have partial immunity from either previous pertussis infection or vaccination may have a milder form of the disease. A low grade but persistent cough may occur and should be considered as possible pertussis.

How is it spread?

Pertussis is easily spread to other people by droplets from coughing or sneezing or by direct contact with secretions from the nose or mouth. People become immune either through vaccination or by having the disease itself but protection is not life long and begins to decrease over time. Sometimes immunised people contract pertussis. They are less likely

to have a severe illness but are still able to transmit the infection. Babies under six months of age are at risk as no protection is passed from mother to newborn infant, and the three doses of vaccine required to give full protection against pertussis are not completed until six months of age. People susceptible to pertussis are those who are either unvaccinated or have decreasing immunity since childhood immunisation.

How long does a person remain infectious?

Cases should be excluded from childcare facilities, school and work until they are no longer considered infectious. Pertussis is infectious for as long as 21 days from when the cough begins, unless five days of a seven-day course of appropriate antibiotics has been taken. If the person with pertussis has been coughing for longer than 21 days by the time the diagnosis has been made, then a course of antibiotics is not usually necessary.

What about others who may have been in contact with someone who has pertussis?

Household members and very close contacts of someone with pertussis are most at risk of infection. To prevent further spread of disease you **may** need a course of antibiotics if you are a:

- household contact aged less than 12 months of age;
- household contact aged between 12 and 24 months and are not fully immunised;
- contact in the last month of pregnancy;
- contact that works at or attends a childcare facility.

A person may become sick anywhere from seven to 21 days after coming in contact with pertussis, but generally symptoms will appear around two weeks after exposure. If your doctor suspects you have pertussis a swab from the nose or a blood test may be taken.

If you think you or your child may have pertussis, please consult your doctor as soon as possible.

Protection against Pertussis

Immunisation is the most effective way of making sure children are protected. Pertussis vaccination is offered to all children as part of the funded National Immunisation Program. It is recommended that children receive the pertussis vaccine at two months, four months, six months and four years of age. The childhood pertussis vaccine can be given up until the eighth birthday. If your child is under eight years of age and has missed one or more of their immunisations, they are urged to 'catch up' by seeing their doctor or immunisation provider. Vaccination provides protection against pertussis for five to ten years. This means that people who were immunised against pertussis as children can still get the disease as adults. A vaccine is now available for adults and older children. Adolescents in the ACT have been offered this vaccine as part of the funded school-based vaccination program in Year 9 since January 2004. Otherwise, the vaccine can be purchased on private prescription.

The adult vaccine is recommended for:

- people planning a pregnancy or as soon as possible after the birth;
- people working with young children, especially healthcare workers and childcare workers in contact with infants; or
- any adult wishing to receive a dose of the vaccine.

If there is a baby in your family, make sure no one with a coughing illness visits the baby. The best way to protect babies is to immunise them and those around them.

Vaccination for new parents and grandparents

ACT Health is currently offering free pertussis vaccine to parents of babies less than 12 months of age and grandparents who have regular contact with them. The free vaccine can be obtained from General Practitioners or through hospital maternity units (for new mothers) until 31 December 2010.

Need more information?

For more information about pertussis, contact your doctor or phone the Health Protection Service Communicable Disease Information Line during business hours on **(02) 6205 2155**.

Communicable Disease Control Section at Health Protection Service is responsible for the investigation and surveillance of notifiable or infectious conditions in the ACT in order to control or prevent their spread in the community. This includes the promotion of immunisation, education and other strategies that help to limit the spread of diseases.

Pertussis is a notifiable disease. Cases notified ACT Health are investigated by Public Health Officers

Acknowledgement:

1. Heymann DJ, 2008, *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 19th edition.
2. NHMRC, 2008, *The Australian Immunisation Handbook*, 9th edition.
3. NSW Health 2009, *Control Guidelines for Infectious Diseases*.
4. NSW Health Infectious Diseases Fact Sheet, *Pertussis*, 2008

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ENGLISH	If you need interpreting help, telephone:
ARABIC	: إذا احتجت لمساعدة في الترجمة الشفوية، إتصل برقم الهاتف:
CHINESE	如果你需要传译员的帮助，请打电话:
CROATIAN	Ako trebate pomoć tumača telefonirajte:
GREEK	Αν χρειάζεστε διερμηνεία τηλεφωνήστε στο
ITALIAN	Se avete bisogno di un interprete, telefonate al numero:
PERSIAN	اگر به ترجمه شفاهی احتیاج دارید به این شماره تلفن کنید:
PORTUGUESE	Se você precisar da ajuda de um intérprete, telefone:
SERBIAN	Ako vam je potrebna pomoć prevodioca telefoniрајте
SPANISH	Si necesita la asistencia de un intérprete, llame al:
TURKISH	Tercümana ihtiyacınız varsa lütfen telefon ediniz:
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