

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

What is pertussis?

Pertussis is a bacterial infection of the nose and throat that spreads very easily. It is also known as whooping cough.

Who gets pertussis?

Most cases of pertussis are seen in children less than five years of age, but anyone can get it. The number of cases in older children and adults is increasing, especially among those who have not had all their vaccines.

A person with mild whooping cough can pass the illness to infants and young children who are not fully immunized. These young children are more likely to have serious problems such as pneumonia, trouble breathing, seizures or death.

People who have had the pertussis vaccine can still get sick, but usually have milder symptoms.

Anyone – especially infants and young children – who is not immunized is at a higher risk for serious illness from whooping cough.

How is it spread?

- Pertussis can be spread to others in close contact with an infected person.
- The illness spreads through the air in droplets from the mouth and nose of an infected person when they cough, sneeze or talk.

When do symptoms begin?

Symptoms appear between 4 – 10 days after exposure, but may take as long as 21 days

What are the symptoms?

Pertussis usually begins with cold or flu-like symptoms:

- runny nose
- mild cough
- watery eyes
- sneezing
- low-grade fever

After 1-2 weeks, the cough often becomes worse. Pertussis can cause “fits” or spells of coughing, followed by a high-pitched whoop when a breath is taken. Sometimes, especially in young children, these coughing spells are followed by vomiting. Older children and adults may have milder symptoms.

How do you prevent pertussis?

- The best prevention is immunization.
 - Vaccines to prevent pertussis are given at 2, 4, 6, & 15 months, and at 4-6 years of age.
 - Students entering 7th grade are required to have a booster vaccine called Tdap to increase their protection against whooping cough.
 - Older children and adults should also get the Tdap vaccine, especially if they have contact with infants under 1 year of age.
 - All pregnant women should receive the Tdap vaccine in their 3rd trimester each time they are pregnant to help protect their babies.
- Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Wash hands often with soap and water.

Updated 12/2014

For more information

Disease Control ~ 828.250.5109

Located at 40 Coxe Ave, downtown Asheville, NC 28801



buncombecounty.org/hhs