

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 at least two months old.

What are the symptoms?

Whooping cough can begin as a mild cold, with a runny nose or congestion, sneezing and a mild cough or fever. If after a week or two, symptoms become worse, they can include:

- a deep rapid coughing and a “whoop”
- 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 virus but could appear 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 occur.

When should I seek healthcare?

If symptoms worsen (as explained above) you are encouraged to consult a primary care provider or call 811. Also, if you believe you have been in close contact with someone with whooping cough, you should also talk to a healthcare provider.

How is it treated?

Pertussis is treated with an antibiotic prescribed by your healthcare provider. The earlier the antibiotic is taken (within 3 weeks of when the cough begins), the less time the person will be infectious, although this may not decrease their symptoms. Some infants, children and adults who are in contact with the person with pertussis may also need to take an antibiotic.

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. See the vaccine schedule on the right for vaccines protecting against whooping cough.

Take care of your family, community and yourself. Get vaccinated.

www.nshealth.ca/immunizations

Vaccines protecting against pertussis

There are two vaccines that help protect children 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.

