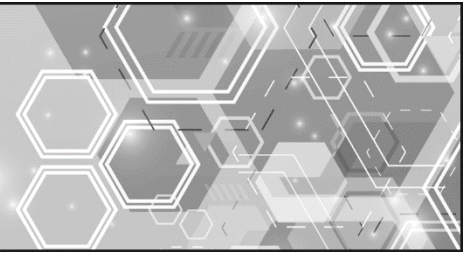




Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

What is it?

Pertussis is most severe when it occurs in the first twelve months of life and can lead to serious complications. People who are not fully vaccinated are most at risk for pertussis. People who are vaccinated can also get pertussis as their immunity may decrease over time.

How is it spread?

Pertussis is very contagious and is spread easily from person to person through droplets in the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It can also be spread by having direct contact with nose and throat secretions of an infected person or through contact with objects touched by an infected person.

People who spend as little as one hour in the same room as a person with pertussis may get sick. Symptoms often start within 6 to 10 days after you come into contact with the bacteria.

Pertussis is most contagious during the first two weeks after the infected person's cough begins. People with pertussis can spread the bacteria for up to three weeks. The risk of spread is low after the third week of symptoms.

What do I look for?

In the early stages, pertussis looks like a common cold. Pertussis usually starts with a runny nose, sneezing and coughing. The cough gets worse over the next one to two weeks until there is repeated, violent coughing. These coughing "fits" can end with a high pitched "whoop" sound, loss of breath or vomiting. The coughing stops over time but can take weeks to months to go away completely. Infants under six months of age and people who have been vaccinated often do not have the "whoop" or the coughing fits. Vaccinated people who become sick with pertussis usually have only mild illness.

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If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



How is it treated?

Pertussis is treated with antibiotics. After five days of treatment, the antibiotics stop the spread of the bacteria. People with pertussis should not be in contact with children, babies, or women in their third trimester of pregnancy, until after five days of taking antibiotics.

For infants, close family members with infants or pregnant women in their third trimester who have been in close contact with a person with pertussis, it may be recommended that an antibiotic be taken to prevent them from getting sick.

How can I protect myself?

- Pertussis is best prevented by vaccination.
- See [Facts About...Diphtheria, Pertussis, Tetanus, Polio & Haemophilus Influenza B Vaccines](#).
- Keep up to date with vaccinations and talk to your health care provider about your need for other vaccines.
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer when hands are not visibly dirty.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow and encourage others to do the same.
- Wash your hands after handling nose and throat secretions (e.g., after throwing out facial tissues containing nose and throat secretions).
- Do not share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys or anything else that has been in contact with saliva, nose or throat secretions.
- If you are sick, stay at home and isolate yourself from others

December 15, 2025