

WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS) FACT SHEET

What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough, also known as pertussis, is an illness that causes a severe cough and may last for months. It can be especially dangerous in babies. Vaccination is the best protection against whooping cough.

What are the symptoms of whooping cough?

People have symptoms similar to the common cold during the first 1 to 2 weeks of whooping cough illness. Symptoms can include a runny or stuffed-up nose, a low-grade fever, and a mild cough. As symptoms progress, coughing fits continue to get worse and can last for more than 6 weeks.

Babies with whooping cough may have a mild cough or no cough at all. Instead, they may show more serious symptoms:

- The baby or young child may have periods where they stop breathing.
- The baby or young child may turn a blue or gray color from lack of oxygen.

If your baby or child has these serious symptoms, take them to the hospital immediately as they may develop life-threatening complications or die.

How is whooping cough spread?

Whooping cough is spread when a person with whooping cough sneezes or coughs. People can breathe in the bacteria and become sick. People with whooping cough remain contagious for weeks after getting sick. People with whooping cough should get antibiotic treatment from their doctor to reduce the amount of time they remain contagious.

How can we prevent whooping cough?

Vaccination is the strongest protection against whooping cough. Washington state experiences more cases of whooping cough when families and children do not stay up to date on whooping cough vaccination.

Babies and children under 7 years of age receive diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (DTaP) vaccination as part of the recommended childhood vaccine schedule. Babies receive their first dose of DTaP at 2 months of age.

Protection from whooping cough vaccination fades over time, so adolescents and adults get a booster vaccine called Tdap. Family members and caregivers of babies and young children should stay up to date on vaccination to protect the ones in their care from getting sick.

Pregnant people should receive Tdap vaccine to prevent their newborn from getting whooping cough. Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider for more information.

Practice healthy habits.

While vaccination is best at preventing whooping cough, you should always practice healthy habits to reduce your risk of getting sick. Avoid touching frequently used objects or surfaces. Do not touch your eyes or face with unwashed hands. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer made of at least 60% alcohol. Wear a mask or face covering in areas where sick people have been.

Find more information about whooping cough.

[Learn more about whooping cough from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention.](#)

[Read Department of Health information on whooping cough vaccination.](#)

[Learn about school and child care requirements for whooping cough vaccination.](#)



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