

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES: *FAST FACTS*

What is pertussis?

- Pertussis, also called “whooping cough,” is a respiratory disease caused by bacteria.
- It often causes serious problems in babies but is usually milder in older children and adults.

Who gets pertussis?

- Pertussis can occur at any age, but infants and young children are at highest risk of life-threatening consequences.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

- The first symptoms -- runny nose, sneezing, mild fever, and cough -- usually appear five to 21 days after a person is infected.
- After one or two weeks, the cough gets worse and usually starts to occur in strong “coughing fits.” This may last six weeks or longer.
- In young children, coughing fits are often followed by a whooping sound as they try to catch their breath.
- After coughing, infected people may have difficulty catching their breath, vomit or become blue in the face from lack of air. The coughing spells may be so severe that it is hard for babies to eat, drink or breathe.

How is pertussis spread?

- Bacteria live in the nose, mouth and throat and are sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks.
- Touching a tissue or sharing a cup can also spread the disease.
- Older children, adolescents, adults and parents who may have a mild illness can spread the disease to infants and young children in the household.

Is pertussis dangerous?

- The illness can be very dangerous for infants, who have the highest risk of pertussis-related complications and death. Almost half of the 342 infants diagnosed with pertussis in Oregon since 2000 have had to be hospitalized. Four infants in Oregon have died of the disease since 2003.

How is pertussis diagnosed?

- A doctor may diagnose based on symptoms and laboratory tests.

How do you treat it?

- Pertussis is treated with antibiotics.

How do you prevent it?

- Cover your cough: Wash your hands.
- Babies should be kept away from anyone who's coughing.
- While there is no lifelong protection against pertussis, immunization is the best preventative measure for your child.
- Vaccinate children against diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis at 2, 4, 6 and 15–18 months, and again at 4 years to kindergarten. DTaP is the name of the vaccine used for children under age 7.
- Vaccinate infants' parents and siblings (age 10 and older) with one dose of Tdap, a booster vaccine that helps protect adolescents and adults from getting pertussis and transmitting it to infants. Even adolescents and adults who don't typically come in contact with small children should be vaccinated.

Is the pertussis vaccine safe?

- Yes, it is safe, although there is a very slight risk of problems such as a local reaction or fever. But the risk of the disease is much more serious.

Is there any pertussis in Oregon?

- So far in 2009, 260 cases of pertussis have been reported in both adults and children.

Where can you get more information?

Please contact your local county health department, or

Visit the following website: <http://oregon.gov/DHS/ph/acd/diseases/pertussis/pertussis.shtml>