



Colorado Department  
of Public Health  
and Environment

# Protect Against Pertussis

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a contagious respiratory illness that can cause a severe and long-lasting cough. It is named after the "whoop" sound that some children and adults make when they try to breathe in during or after a severe coughing spell.

## Symptoms

Whooping cough usually starts with cold symptoms such as runny nose, sneezing, low or no fever, and a mild cough. The cough becomes more severe and causes coughing fits (spells). In between coughing fits, the individual might look and feel fine. Vomiting, breathlessness, a change in facial color, and/or a whooping sound might follow the coughing fits.

## How Pertussis Is Spread

Whooping cough is caused by a certain type of bacteria that are found in the nose and throat of an infected person. It is spread through **close** contact with respiratory droplets (secretions) that are produced when an infected person talks, sneezes or coughs. Older children and adults commonly spread the disease to infants. Pertussis can be particularly dangerous, and even fatal, for infants (especially young infants).

## Controlling the Spread

Infected family members can spread pertussis throughout the household. If a family member has been diagnosed with pertussis, it is important to talk to your health care provider about which family members might benefit from antibiotic therapy to prevent further illness and spread.

## How To Prevent Pertussis

The best prevention is immunization.

**To prevent the spread of pertussis to infants, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment recommends the tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis (Tdap) vaccine for the following groups who don't normally receive Tdap vaccine:**

- **all** adults who provide care to infants and adults living in a household with an infant, including adults age 65 and older;
- preadolescents (ages 7-10 years) who are **not** up to date on pertussis vaccinations **and** who are living in a household with an infant.

The following pertussis vaccines are routinely recommended for these age groups:

- diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (DTaP) vaccination of all infants at 2, 4 and 6 months
- DTaP vaccination booster for all children at age 12-15 months
- DTaP vaccination booster for all children at age 4-6 years

- Tdap vaccination booster for all adolescents at age 11-12 years
- Tdap vaccination booster for adolescents 13-18 years who have not received a Tdap booster
- Tdap vaccination booster for all adults younger than age 65

The following healthy habits help prevent the spread of pertussis and other respiratory illnesses:

- washing hands regularly
- covering your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- avoiding touching eyes, nose and mouth
- staying home when ill

For additional information about pertussis and surveillance statistics (updated weekly) see <http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/Epidemiology/Pertussis/index.html> .

**Ask your health care provider about pertussis vaccines.**