

# Whooping Cough (Pertussis)



## What Is It?

Whooping cough is a serious respiratory infection caused by a bacteria that is highly contagious. It gets its name from the whooping sound the child makes when trying to draw breath after a coughing spell. It can be prevented by immunization.

## What Are the Symptoms?

Symptoms generally include those of a cold, such as runny nose and a cough that gradually worsens. Violent coughing spells frequently end with vomiting. The coughing can lead to severe episodes or fits of coughing in which children gasp (or whoop) for breaths of air. It is a very serious disease for children under six months, as they may develop other complications that require hospitalization such as pneumonia, ear infections and swelling of the brain.

## Who Gets It and How?

Whooping cough is very contagious and dangerous. It is spread from person to person through the air. A person who is not immune to whooping cough becomes infected by breathing air that has been contaminated with the respiratory discharges of an infected person who has coughed. Adults and partially immunized children get milder symptoms of the disease and can transmit it to children.

Before vaccines and antibiotics were developed, whooping cough was a common cause of death in young children. Today, it is vaccine preventable. Children in the United States are now immunized with the whooping cough vaccine beginning at two months of age and again at four months, six months, 15 months, and four to six years. All children attending a child care facility should be up to date on vaccinations.

## When Should People with this Illness Be Excluded?

Exclude the infected person from the facility until that person has been on antibiotics for at least five days or for four weeks after onset of intense coughing.

## How Can I Limit the Spread of Whooping Cough?

- Require up-to-date immunization certificates for all children in your care.

- Licensing requires that child care providers report to their local health department and to Licensing if there are two or more known or suspected cases of whooping cough in a child care program. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly recommends that child care providers report even if there is only a single case, to ensure that the local Public Health Department is aware that this serious illness is present in a child care setting.
- Notify all parents/guardians of children whenever there is even one case of whooping cough. Keep the identity of the infected child confidential. It is important that parents monitor their children for any symptoms, especially if the children are not completely immunized against whooping cough.
- Always practice precautions to reduce respiratory infections such as hand washing, coughing into elbow or sleeve or away from people, disinfecting the environment and good air quality.
- Carefully monitor all children and staff for coughs. Anyone developing a persistent cough should be immediately referred to his or her health care provider.



**California Childcare Health Program**

800-333-3212 *Healthline*

510-839-1195 *Telephone*

[www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org](http://www.ucsfchildcarehealth.org)