



# Pertussis

## (Whooping Cough)

### What is pertussis?

- Pertussis is an infection caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.

### How does a person get pertussis?

- The bacteria is spread by direct contact with airborne droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person.
- The bacteria spreads easily when people are in close contact as in households, classrooms, and child care centres.

### What are the signs and symptoms?

- Symptoms usually develop 7 to 10 days after a person has become infected.
- The first signs of illness are usually a runny nose and an irritating cough, similar to a cold.
- Within days, the cough becomes more frequent and severe, often occurring in attacks.
- The coughing attack may end with vomiting and/or shortness of breath.
- A characteristic “whoop” at the end of the coughing spell is common in children under one year of age.
- Symptoms are usually worse at night.
- The cough can last 6 to 10 weeks.

### How is pertussis treated?

- Early diagnosis and treatment is important.
- A special swab that reaches the back of the nasal cavity is used to test for pertussis. A throat swab is not appropriate.

- Treatment with an appropriate antibiotic (azithromycin, clarithromycin, erythromycin) is needed.

### How is pertussis prevented?

- Pertussis immunization is available for children up to 14 years of age.
- Watch for signs and symptoms.
- If symptoms occur, see a doctor for early diagnosis and treatment.
- A person with symptoms, may continue to attend school, work, child care facility or activity group unless:
  - there is a child under one year of age in attendance *or*
  - there is a pregnant woman in the last three months of pregnancy in attendance (in a school setting this means the teacher in the same class as the case).
- Symptomatic household contacts should be treated.
- Close contacts (those under one year of age or pregnant women in the last three months of pregnancy) who are not symptomatic should be assessed by a doctor and put on preventive antibiotics.

#### Quick Facts

- Pertussis vaccine is part of routine childhood immunization.
- The main symptom of pertussis is a persistent, dry, irritating cough.
- Early diagnosis and treatment is important.

For more information contact your public health nurse, doctor or  
HealthLine at 1-877-800-0002