

# Huron County Public Health

**Prevent. Promote. Protect.**

## Pertussis/Whooping Cough

### WHAT IS PERTUSSIS?

Pertussis—or whooping cough—is a very serious respiratory infection in the lungs and breathing tubes. It is caused by the pertussis bacteria. It causes violent coughing fits that can't be stopped. Whooping cough is most harmful for young babies and can be deadly. The DTaP vaccine protects against whooping cough.

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of pertussis usually develop within 5 to 10 days after exposure. Sometimes pertussis symptoms do not develop for as long as 3 weeks.

Early symptoms can last for 1 to 2 weeks and may appear to be nothing more than a common cold. Symptoms include:

- Runny nose
- Low-grade fever
- Mild cough
- A pause in breathing in infants (apnea)

Later-stage symptoms may include:

- Fits of many, rapid coughs followed by a “whoop” sound. Pertussis can cause violent, rapid coughing, over and over, until the air is gone from the lungs. When there is no more air in the lungs, a person is forced to inhale with a loud “whooping” sound. Coughing fits can go on for up to 10 weeks or more.
- Throwing up during or after coughing fits
- Becoming very tired after coughing fits

### HOW SERIOUS IS PERTUSSIS/WHOOPING COUGH?

More than half of babies younger than 1 year who get the disease need care in the hospital. About 1 out of 5 babies and children with whooping cough will get pneumonia (a serious lung infection). Whooping cough can also cause seizures (jerking or staring) and brain damage.

### HOW IS PERTUSSIS/WHOOPING IS SPREAD?

Whooping cough spreads easily through the air when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes. A person can spread the disease while he or she has cold-like symptoms and for at least 2 weeks after coughing starts.

Many babies and young children get whooping cough from adults or older siblings who don't know they have the disease. Pregnant women with whooping cough can give it to their newborn babies. Because whooping cough is so harmful to babies, everyone around them needs to be vaccinated—to make a circle of protection.



## DTAP VACCINE

The DTaP vaccine is a shot that combines the vaccines for whooping cough (pertussis) and two other serious diseases: diphtheria and tetanus. The DTaP vaccine protects children by preparing their bodies to fight the bacteria.

Most children, about 89%, who get all doses of the DTaP vaccine will be protected from whooping cough. But, protection from DTaP vaccine decreases over time. Some children who are vaccinated do get the disease, but it is usually a milder case.

The DTaP vaccine is very safe, and it is effective at preventing whooping cough (and two other diseases: diphtheria and tetanus). Vaccines are like medicines, and any medicine can have side effects. But severe side effects from the DTaP vaccine are very rare.

## DTAP/WHOOPING COUGH VACCINE RECOMMENDATIONS

Getting your child the DTaP vaccine helps protect him against whooping cough. It also protects other people who can't get the vaccine—especially newborn babies, who can get very sick and die from whooping cough.

- Children should get five doses of the DTaP vaccine at the following ages for best protection:
  - One dose each at 2 months, 4 months, and 6 months;
  - A fourth dose at 15 through 18 months; and
  - A fifth dose at 4 through 6 years of age.
- Pre-Teens & Teens should get a booster shot (Tdap) at 11 or 12 years old.
- Adults that have never received a Tdap vaccine may get one at anytime.
- Pregnant women may get the Tdap vaccine during the 27-36th week of each pregnancy. Getting the whooping cough vaccine while pregnant can pass the protection to your baby.

## PREVENTION

Besides getting vaccinated there are some other actions that can help prevent the spread of pertussis. Pertussis spreads by coughing and sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the bacteria. Good hygiene can help to prevent spreading the illness.

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Put your used tissue in the trash.
- Cough or sneeze into your sleeve or elbow, not your hands, if you don't have a tissue.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use an alcohol-based hand run if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid contact with those that are sick.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

To learn more about the DTaP vaccine or other vaccines, talk to your child's doctor.

You can also call Huron County Public Health at (419)668-1652 or go to [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).

