



Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

MU Patient Education Series

Definition:

Whooping cough is a very serious respiratory (in the lungs and breathing tubes) infection caused by the pertussis bacteria called *Bordetella Pertussis*. It causes violent coughing you can't stop. Whooping cough is most harmful for young babies and can be deadly. The DTaP vaccine protects against whooping cough.

SIGNS/SYMPTOMS:

- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Mild cough
- A pause in breathing in babies (apnea)
- After 1 to 2 weeks severe coughing often starts

SPECIFICS ON BABIES AND CHILDREN:

- Children and babies can cough very hard, over and over
- When children gasp for breath after a coughing fit, they make a "whooping" sound
- Babies may not cough or make this sound
- Coughing fits make it hard to breathe, eat, drink, or sleep
- Coughing fits happen more at night
- Babies and young children may turn blue while coughing from lack of oxygen
- Babies and young children may vomit after coughing fits
- Coughing fits can last for 10 weeks, this may stop and come back

TREATMENT FOR WHOOPING COUGH:

- A vaccine called DTaP is available



BENEFITS OF THE DTAP VACCINE:

- Saves lives
- Protects children from serious disease
- Keeps others safe

HOW DOES WHOOPING COUGH SPREAD?

- Spreads easily through the air when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes
- Can be spread while cold-like symptoms are present
- Can be spread for at least 2 weeks after coughing starts

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PROTECT A CHILD FROM WHOOPING COUGH?

- Keep newborns away from anyone with cold symptoms or cough
- Give the whooping cough vaccination on time
- Make sure family members have been vaccinated
- Keep a record of vaccinations

WHAT IS THE 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 by preparing their bodies to fight the bacteria.

WHEN SHOULD A PERSON GET THE DTAP VACCINE?

Children should get five doses of the DTaP vaccine at the following ages for best protection:

- One dose at 2 months
- Second dose at 4 months
- Third dose at 6 months
- Fourth dose at 15 through 18 months
- Fifth dose between 4 and 6 years of age

Pre-teens, teens and adults may receive a one-time Tdap booster vaccine

- Pre-teens should receive the booster vaccine at 11 or 12 years of age (pre-teen)
- Teens and adults that did not receive the Tdap vaccine as pre-teens should get it



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Resources:

Center for Disease Control & Prevention. 2013. Diseases and Vaccines that prevent them. Pertussis (whooping cough). Accessed on August 8, 2013 from: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/downloads/PL-dis-pertussis-color-office.pdf>

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