

# Whooping Cough (Pertussis)



## What is whooping cough (Pertussis)?

Whooping cough is a contagious respiratory illness caused by bacteria. When infected, bacteria in the lungs and throat cause a cough that sounds like a “whoop”.<sup>1,2</sup>

## What are the common symptoms of whooping cough?

Symptoms typically appear 5-10 days after being infected. Early signs of whooping cough can be a runny or stuffy nose, low fever, and a cough.

As the infection gets worse, the person may have coughing that does not stop. The coughing fits can last 1–6 weeks or more.



## Symptoms can include:

- High pitched “whoop” when breathing or coughing
- Vomit during or after the coughing fits
- Trouble sleeping
- Trouble breathing
- Fracturing (minorly breaking) a rib

Some infants with whooping cough may not have a cough. Some may struggle to breathe or stop breathing and may turn blue.<sup>2</sup>

## How does whooping cough spread?

Whooping cough is spread by tiny water droplets containing the bacteria. People can become sick by:

- Breathing in the droplets. This can happen when a sick person coughs, sneezes, breathes, or talks.
- Touching their mouth, nose, or eyes after touching objects covered in the droplets.

Whooping cough can be spread even by people who do not feel sick or have symptoms.<sup>1</sup>

Infants under 12 months, especially unvaccinated infants, are at highest risk for severe complications or hospitalization.<sup>3</sup>

## How do you treat whooping cough?

People with whooping cough are treated with antibiotics. See a healthcare provider if you think you or a Relative has whooping cough. The provider may recommend other medicines to help symptoms.<sup>4</sup>

## How can I protect myself & my loved one?

The best way to protect yourself and your loved ones is to get the whooping cough vaccine. The vaccine for young children is called the DTap and for older children and adults is called the Tdap. The vaccine is safe and effective in preventing whooping cough, especially for babies and children.

### Young Children (Age 2 months to 6 years)

- Total of 5 doses of DTap
  - 1st dose: 2 months
  - 2nd dose: 4 months
  - 3rd dose: 6 months
  - 4th dose: 15–18 months
  - 5th dose: 4–6 years

### Pre-teen (11–12 years old)

- 1 dose of Tdap (at 11–12 years) and a booster dose every 10 years for life

### Adults (19 years and older)

- If not vaccinated, the CDC recommends 1 dose of Tdap and a booster dose every 10 years for life

### Pregnant People

- 1 dose for every pregnancy within the 27th–36th week (third trimester)

## What are the most common side effects of vaccine?

Most side effects of the DTap and Tdap vaccines are mild and will go away within a few days.

Children receiving the DTap vaccine may experience:

- Pain and swelling around the injection site
- Fever
- Irritability
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting

Pre-teens and adults receiving the Tdap vaccine may experience:

- Pain and swelling around the injection site
- Fever
- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach ache<sup>5</sup>

To continue protecting your loved ones, wear a mask while sick and practice healthy habits of covering coughs and sneezes. Regularly wash your hands to limit the spread of germs.

### References

1. March 3, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/index.html>
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3. CDC. Clinical Features of Pertussis. April 2, 2024. Accessed April 16, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/hcp/clinical-signs/index.html>
4. CDC. Treatment of Whooping Cough. Pertussis (Whooping Cough). April 15, 2024. Accessed March 4, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/treatment/index.html>
5. CDC. Whooping Cough Vaccination. Whooping Cough (Pertussis). January 30, 2025. Accessed March 4, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/vaccines/index.html>

