

# Three Rivers District Health Department & Home Health Agency

510 South Main Street  
Owenton, Kentucky 40359  
PH: (502) 484-3412  
FAX: (502) 484-0864

March 29, 2016

## Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

### What is pertussis?

Pertussis (whooping cough) can be a serious illness, especially in young, unimmunized children, but adults can also contract this illness. Pertussis is highly contagious with up to 80 percent of susceptible household contacts developing the disease after exposure.

### What are the symptoms of the pertussis?

The first symptoms of pertussis are like those of a common cold: runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever and a mild cough. After a week or two, a persistent cough develops which occurs in explosive bursts, sometimes ending with a high-pitched whoop and vomiting. Between bursts of coughing, the child appears well. Coughing attacks continue to occur for four to six weeks and are more common at night. Pertussis is frequently complicated by pneumonia and ear infections, particularly in infants. Death from pertussis is rare.

### How is pertussis spread?

By coming in contact with droplets that are expelled during sneezing and coughing of an infected person.

### If I've been exposed to pertussis how long will it take for symptoms to develop?

Symptoms usually appear in seven to 21 days, but most frequently show up in seven to 10 days.

### How long is a person with the pertussis contagious?

A person with pertussis is contagious from the time early cold-like symptoms develop through three weeks after the persistent and explosive bursts of coughing begin. Those treated with antibiotics are contagious until five days after effective treatment begins.

### How can I keep from getting pertussis?

The best way to prevent pertussis in infants and young children is the DTP/DTaP vaccine. It is recommended that children receive five doses of the vaccine, with the first three doses given at one to two months intervals, starting at 8 weeks. The fourth dose should be at least six months after the third dose, commonly at 15-18 months of age. A fifth dose (booster) is given between 4 and 6 years of age. Vaccination should be completed by age 6.

In addition, a vaccine for older children and adults is available and recommended, particularly for those who come in to contact with small children.

### What should I do if I think I have pertussis?

See your medical provider for testing and treatment. Tell the provider if you or your child has been around others with cough/cold symptoms or that you've heard pertussis is in your community.

Since pertussis remains contagious for three weeks after the coughing begins, it is advised that you do not go to work or school during that time, if antibiotics are not prescribed. If you are treated with antibiotics, you can return to school or work after completing five days of the prescribed antibiotics.

### If I have pertussis, how can I prevent others from getting it?

Avoid coming into close contact with anyone until five days of antibiotic treatment for pertussis have been completed.

### What treatments are available for pertussis? How serious is the disease?

1. Refer to the Kentucky immunization regulations for childhood vaccination schedule.

2. If your child is not protected against pertussis, please contact your health care provider as soon as possible to have your child immunized. Inadequately immunized children will be excluded from any child care setting in which a case of pertussis occurs. Please notify your child care provider if your child has been immunized so his/her records can be updated.

# Three Rivers District Health Department & Home Health Agency

510 South Main Street  
Owenton, Kentucky 40359  
PH: (502) 484-3412  
FAX: (502) 484-0864

### 3. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends:

a. Household and other close contacts less than 7 years of age who have not had at least four doses of pertussis vaccine should receive a booster dose of vaccine, preferably as DTP/DTaP, unless a booster was given within the past three years. Children who have received their third dose six or more months before exposure should be given the fourth dose at this time. Children who are unimmunized or who have received fewer than four doses of DTP/DTaP should start or continue their DTP/DTaP immunizations according to the recommended schedule.

b. Household and other close contacts (including child care contacts) also should receive antibiotic treatment because immunity from vaccination is not absolute, and older children and adults can transmit infection. This treatment may prevent symptoms from occurring.

4. If a child develops any of the symptoms described above in the next 20 days, keep him/her at home and call your health care provider.

