



WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS)

What is whooping cough? Clinically known as pertussis, whooping cough is a highly contagious respiratory tract infection. In advanced stages, it's marked as a severe, hacking cough followed by a high-pitched intake of breath that sounds like "whoop." In the first half of the 20th century, whooping cough was a leading cause of childhood illness and death in the United States. But after the introduction of a vaccine, the number of cases gradually declined, reaching a low in the mid-1970s. Since then, however, the incidence of whooping cough has been increasing, primarily among children too young to have completed the full course of vaccinations and teenagers and adults whose immunity has faded.

Symptoms – Once you (or your baby) become infected with whooping cough, it takes 3 to 12 days for signs and symptoms to appear.

Usually mild at first, the symptoms resemble those of a common cold:

- Runny nose
- Nasal congestion
- Sneezing
- Red, watery eyes
- A mild fever
- Dry cough

After a week or two, signs & symptoms worsen. Severe & prolonged coughing attacks may:

- Bring up thick phlegm
- Provoke vomiting
- Result in a red or blue face
- Cause extreme fatigue
- End with a high-pitched "whoop" sound during the next breath of air

However, many people — particularly infants, adolescents, and adults — don't develop the characteristic "whoop" sound. Sometimes, a persistent hacking cough is the only sign that an adolescent or adult has whooping cough.

When to see a doctor – Call your doctor if prolonged coughing spells make you or your baby:

- Vomit
- Turn red or blue
- Inhale with a whooping sound

Prevention – The CDC recommends that the best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated. Adults who didn't get Tdap as a pre-teen or teen should get one dose of Tdap. Most pregnant women who were not previously vaccinated with Tdap should get one dose of Tdap postpartum before leaving the hospital or shortly after their home birth. Getting vaccinated with Tdap is especially important for families with, and caregivers of, new infants. Adults 65 years and older who have close contact with infants should get a dose of Tdap, following the newest vaccine recommendations. For more info: <http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/ContentDisplay.aspx?id=3954>

References:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/whooping-cough/DS00445>
<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/Pertussis/>