

FACT SHEET

PERTUSSIS

(Whooping cough)

<i>What is Pertussis?</i>	It is an easily spread disease, commonly known as whooping cough. It is caused by bacteria that live in the respiratory tract. There are vaccines that can protect from pertussis.
<i>How is it spread?</i>	It is spread by direct contact with discharges from the nose or airborne droplets released when an infected person coughs or sneezes. It is only found in humans.
<i>What is the incubation period?</i>	Symptoms usually develop within 7-10 days after exposure, but could be as early as 5 days and as long as 21 days.
<i>What are the early signs?</i>	It starts out like a common cold. Then in 1-2 weeks, the cough becomes stronger and the child will have attacks of severe, rapid, deep coughs and may have difficulty breathing from the thick mucus in the nose and throat. Sometimes they will vomit at the end of an attack. Attacks are worse at night and can go on for many weeks. Teens and adults may have milder symptoms, but they can pass the disease on to younger family members at risk for severe illness.
<i>What about contacts?</i>	Close contacts under 7 years who have not had 4 valid doses of DTaP/DTP vaccine should receive a dose as soon as possible. Close contacts (household members) should be treated with appropriate antibiotics. Contacts age 10-64 who have not had a Td in the past 5 years, should get a Tdap vaccine.
<i>How long is the person contagious?</i>	A person is highly contagious early in the disease and slowly decreases over the 3 weeks following the deep, whooping cough. With antibiotic treatment, the person is usually not infectious after 5 days.
<i>When is it OK to return to childcare/school/work?</i>	A person with pertussis may return to school/work after completing 5 days of antibiotics. An unimmunized or under-immunized contact may return 21 days after the last pertussis case or after 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment. Persons suspected of having pertussis should stay at home to avoid spreading this potentially fatal disease to others.
<i>What else should I know?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pertussis is the ‘P’ in the DTaP/ DTP/Tdap vaccines. Thimerosal-free DTaP is available. • 90% of deaths from Pertussis occur in infants under 6 month of age, most unimmunized. • Scrub hands with warm, soapy water for 15-20 seconds. Encourage children to cover mouth & nose when coughing or sneezing and to throw used tissues promptly into a wastebasket.

This fact sheet is not intended to replace the advice of your physician. Parents should contact their healthcare provider if they have concerns regarding their child's health. If you have general questions, you may contact a Kalamazoo County nurse at 373-5264 or 373-5267.