

## Pertussis Information Sheet

### What is pertussis?

Pertussis, commonly called whooping cough, is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by a bacteria (germ) called *Bordetella pertussis*. The infection can be life-threatening for infants less than one year of age. Pertussis is a vaccine-preventable disease.

### How can you catch pertussis?

Pertussis spreads through contact with fluids from the nose, mouth and throat of an infected person (these fluids may be on surfaces or in infected droplets of coughs or sneezes). People are contagious from the beginning of cold-like symptoms until 3 weeks after the cough begins. Pertussis is currently circulating in our community.

### What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Symptoms can begin up to 3 weeks after exposure (commonly 5-10 days) and can include:

- Cold-like stage (first 1-2 weeks of illness)
- Uncontrollable fits of coughing
- "Whooping sound" with cough
- Throwing up after fits of coughing
- Change of skin color with coughing
- Pauses in breathing (apnea)

**Infants with pertussis often have pauses in breathing (apnea) and may or may NOT have a cough with these episodes.** Symptoms in immunized children and adults may be mild and go unrecognized. The cough may last up to 100 days.

### How can you be treated for pertussis?

Pertussis is generally treated with antibiotics prescribed by a doctor. Early treatment may make the infection less severe and help prevent spread to others.

### How can you prevent pertussis?

**The best way to protect against pertussis is through vaccination; check with your healthcare provider to make sure all family members are up-to-date on their pertussis vaccinations. Infants, children, adults, pregnant women, and elderly adults all need pertussis vaccinations.**

- People infected with pertussis that work in or attend schools, childcares, or healthcare settings must stay home from those settings until completing 5 days of antibiotic use or until 3 weeks after cough onset if untreated.
- Household members and close contacts of someone with pertussis may need to receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting sick.