

Pertussis: What Parents Need to Know

PERTUSSIS ACTIVITY HAS BEEN ELEVATED WITHIN THE SOUTHEAST REGION OF MINNESOTA SINCE MAY OF 2016

What is pertussis?

- Pertussis, or whooping cough, is an infection of the lungs that causes a persistent cough. Anyone of any age can get pertussis.

What the symptoms of pertussis?

- Initial symptoms are similar to a cold (runny nose, sneezing, mild cough, possibly a low grade fever)
- After a week or two, the cough worsens and begins to occur in sudden, uncontrollable bursts.
- Children may make high-pitched whooping sounds when gasping for breath after coughing.
- Vomiting can occur following coughing.
- Coughing spells may continue for several weeks or months until the lungs heal.

How is pertussis spread?

- Pertussis bacteria are spread through droplets produced during coughing or sneezing.
- Droplets don't travel very far through the air and usually only infect persons nearby.

When and for how long can a person spread pertussis?

- Persons with pertussis can spread it to others in the first 3 weeks of coughing if not treated with antibiotics.
- After a person with pertussis has taken antibiotics for 5 days, he or she can no longer spread the disease.

How long should someone with pertussis stay home from child care, school, or work?

- Persons with pertussis should stay home from child care, school, work, and other activities until they have finished 5 days of antibiotics, unless they have already been coughing for 3 or more weeks.

How can pertussis be prevented?

- The best way to prevent pertussis is to be vaccinated.
- A pertussis vaccine booster (Tdap) is recommended for adolescents and adults.

- Ask your healthcare provider for more information.

Why is my child still getting pertussis even though he has been vaccinated?

- Studies have shown that the immunity from the vaccine decreases after 2-3 years from the last vaccination, which is usually given before kindergarten.

Is there a lab test for pertussis?

- To test for pertussis, the nasal passage is swabbed. The material on the swab is then examined in the lab for the presence of pertussis bacteria.
- Only persons with symptoms of pertussis should be tested!

Who should receive antibiotic treatment or prophylaxis?

- Persons who have a positive test result and have been coughing for less than 21 days.
- Immediate family members and individuals at high risk of complications of pertussis infection may be recommended for preventative treatment.

Should we ever close schools, recreation centers, or community centers due to pertussis?

- No. MDH does not recommend closing such facilities due to outbreaks of pertussis. There is no evidence that it prevents the spread of disease, as children/adolescents may congregate in other settings.

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