

# Pertussis

## What is it?

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a very contagious respiratory illness caused by *Bordetella pertussis* bacteria. It can be especially dangerous for infants. In infants younger than 12 months with pertussis, about 1/3 need hospital treatment.



## How does pertussis spread?

By breathing in tiny droplets from the cough or sneeze of an infected person.

## Symptoms

It usually takes 5-10 days for symptoms to develop, but it can take up to 21. Symptoms may include:

- Runny or stuffy nose
- Low-grade fever
- Coughing, which may become severe, with coughing fits (uncommon in infants) and high-pitched “whooping” sound
- Difficulty breathing—infants may have apnea (pauses in breathing) and turn blue or purple
- Vomiting
- Fatigue



## Please take extra precautions

- Pregnant people, particularly in their third trimester, and anyone in contact with infants and pregnant people, like family members, child and health care workers, and childbirth educators should take precautions to prevent spreading pertussis to infants younger than 1 year.
- People with immunocompromising conditions and moderate-to-severe asthma should also take precautions.



## Ways to prevent pertussis

- Vaccination is the best protection—make sure you’re up to date
- Talk to your health care provider and take preventive antibiotics if you’ve been exposed to pertussis
- Stay away from people who are sick
- Follow good respiratory hygiene—cover coughs and sneezes

## When sick

- Talk with your health care provider and take antibiotics as prescribed
- Stay home for 5 days after beginning antibiotics
- Drink fluids
- Keep your home free of smoke, dust, and chemical fumes to reduce coughing
- Use a clean, cool mist humidifier to ease symptoms



Learn more about pertussis  
(whooping cough)