

WHAT IS PERTUSSIS?

Worldwide, there are an estimated 24.1 million cases of pertussis and about 160,700 deaths per year.

More commonly referred to as whooping cough, pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by *Bordetella pertussis*. Though whooping cough can affect people of all ages, it is most serious, even deadly, in babies younger than six months who are not protected by immunizations.

01 | Causes

Pertussis can last anywhere between six and ten weeks. This disease is spread from person to person by coughing or sneezing when spending a lot of time sharing breathable space with another person. Those who catch the disease are most contagious up to around two weeks after the cough begins. Because of this, many family members or caregivers who may not know they carry the disease can spread it to others, especially infants.

02 | Symptoms

Symptoms begin to appear about seven to ten days after infection. Initial symptoms are typically mild and resemble those of a common cold. After about two weeks, thick mucus accumulates in the airways, which causes uncontrollable coughing and can last up to three months. Severe, prolonged coughing attacks may:

- Promote vomiting
- Result in a blue or red face
- Cause extreme fatigue
- End with a high-pitched “whoop” sound during the next breath

Some infants who develop this disease may not cough at all. Instead, they may struggle to breathe or briefly stop breathing.

03 | Prevention

The best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated and keep babies and others at high risk away from those who are infected. The pertussis vaccine is part of the DTaP immunization routinely given in five doses before a child's sixth birthday. It is also good to take precautions — like washing your hands often and keeping surfaces clean — to reduce the risk of contracting and spreading pertussis.

For more information on pertussis and supportive resources, please visit www.cdc.gov/pertussis.

Did You Know?

Approximately half of infants less than 1 year old who get pertussis need treatment in a hospital.

References

<https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/index.html>

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/whooping-cough.html>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/whooping-cough/symptoms-causes/syc-20378973>

<https://www.sutterhealth.org/diseases-conditions/pediatric-conditions/whooping-cough>