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Pertussis Fact Sheet

About Whooping Cough

KEY POINTS

- Whooping cough, also known as pertussis, is a very contagious respiratory illness.
- Whooping cough may begin like a common cold, but unlike a cold, the coughing can last for weeks or months.
- Treating whooping cough early with antibiotics may make the infection less serious.

What it is

Whooping cough is a respiratory illness caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. The disease is only found in humans.

Whooping cough bacteria attach to the cilia (tiny, hair-like extensions) that line part of the upper respiratory system. The bacteria release toxins (poisons), which damage the cilia and cause airways to swell.

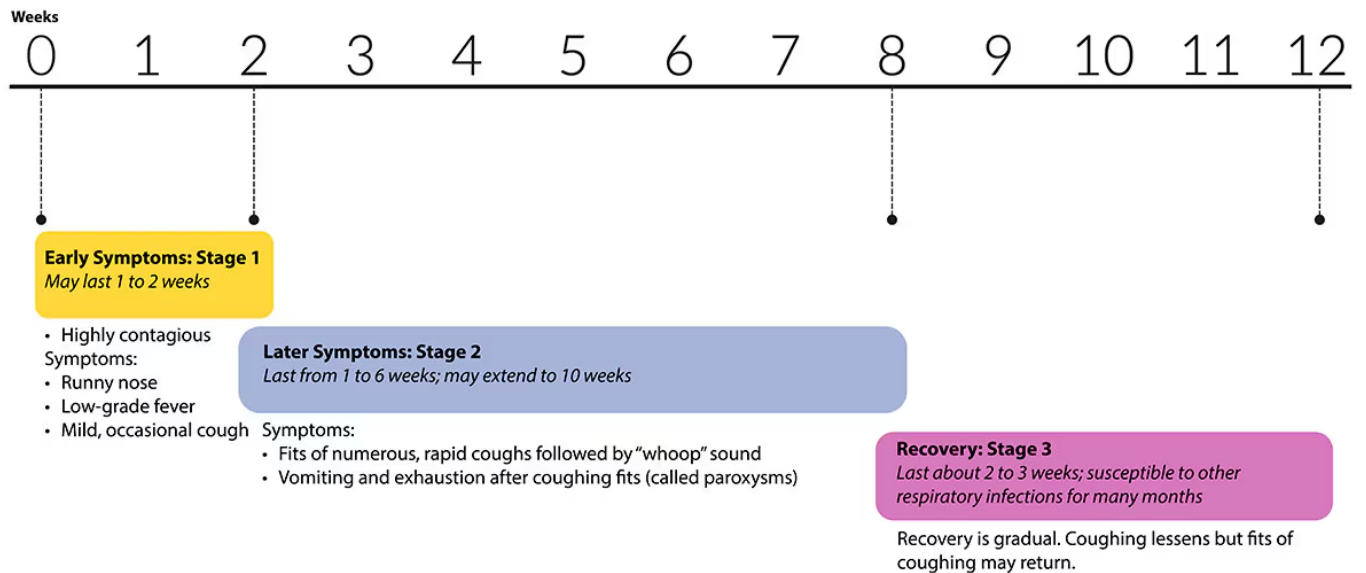


Symptoms

KEY POINTS

- Early symptoms of pertussis (whooping cough) can look like a common cold.
- Whooping cough is known for the "whoop" noise when someone gasps for air after a coughing fit.
- Babies and young children may not cough but may have difficulty breathing instead.

Whooping Cough Disease Progression



cdc.gov/whoopingcough



0-100044



How it spreads

- The bacteria that cause whooping cough spread easily from **person to person** through the air. When a person with whooping cough sneezes or coughs, they release small particles with the bacteria in them. Other people can then breathe in the bacteria.
- These bacteria can spread when people spend a lot of time together or share breathing space.

People can be contagious for weeks

- People can spread the bacteria from the start of symptoms and for at least 2 weeks after coughing begins.
- Taking antibiotics early in the illness may shorten the amount of time someone's contagious.

People can unknowingly spread the bacteria


Some people have mild symptoms and don't know they have whooping cough, but they can still spread the bacteria to others. Many babies who get whooping cough are infected by older siblings, parents, or caregivers who don't know they have it.




Prevention

- **Vaccination**

People of all ages need **WHOOPING COUGH VACCINES**



DTaP for young children	Tdap for preteens	Tdap for pregnant women	Tdap for adults
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 2, 4, and 6 months ✓ 15 through 18 months ✓ 4 through 6 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ 11 through 12 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ During the 27-36th week of each pregnancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Anytime for those who have never received it
www.cdc.gov/whoopingcough			

- **Antibiotics**

Preventive antibiotics are also known as postexposure antimicrobial prophylaxis (PEP). These are medicines given to someone who has been exposed to harmful bacteria to help **prevent them from getting sick**.

Some people should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting sick if they have been around someone with whooping cough.

If you've been exposed to someone with whooping cough, talk to a healthcare provider about preventive antibiotics. A healthcare provider or health department generally decides who should get preventive antibiotics.



Testing and diagnosis

Whooping cough can be difficult to diagnose because the signs and symptoms are often similar to other respiratory illnesses. It can be helpful to know if you've been in contact with someone who has whooping cough.

Healthcare providers can diagnose whooping cough by doing a

- History of typical signs and symptoms
- Physical exam
- Laboratory test of a mucus sample from the back of the throat
- Blood test

Treatment and recovery

It's very important to **treat whooping cough early**, before coughing fits begin. Healthcare providers generally treat whooping cough with antibiotics. Further treatment in the hospital may be required if symptoms are serious.

**For any questions, please contact Portsmouth City Health Department
Epidemiologist**

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Find additional resources at: <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/index.html>