



# Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

## What is it?

- Pertussis, also called whooping cough, is an infection in the airways caused by bacteria.

## Signs and symptoms

- Symptoms start as a common cold with:
- Sneezing, runny nose, mild fever and a mild cough
- The cough gets progressively worse.
- The cough is severe, repeated and forceful. The coughing periods are often followed by vomiting and/or a whoop sound before the next breath.
- Cough may be absent in very young infants. It may appear as a pause in their breathing.
- The cough can last many months and is more common at night.
- Whooping cough can cause pneumonia, seizures, brain damage or death.

## How is it spread?

- It is spread by breathing the air of a person who has the infection.
- It can be spread by touching saliva or mucus of a person who has the bacteria.
- Without medicine, pertussis can be shared a few days before a person has a cough and up to three weeks after the cough starts.
- A person with whooping cough will be given antibiotics. Household members may be given antibiotics depending on the assessment completed by your health care provider.
- An infected child should not return to school until they have taken antibiotics for 5 days and feel well enough to return.

## How to Decrease the Spread?

- The best way to protect yourself and others is to be vaccinated. Some people who have been vaccinated may still get pertussis



but is a milder form of the disease than those who have not been vaccinated.

- Wash your hands often. Avoid your touching face, nose and eyes.
- Use good coughing technique by coughing into your sleeve.

## Pregnant women:

Pregnant women in their third trimester and infants under one, regardless of their vaccination status, are at the highest risk of complications and should be treated with antibiotics. Call your Health Care Provider.

## Recommended Absence

- 5 days after treatment with appropriate antibiotics
- If untreated, approximately 3 weeks

Pertussis **must** be reported to the Medical Officer of Health as required by the Health Promotion and Protection Act.

## Resources

[www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca)  
Government of Canada ([gov.on.ca](http://gov.on.ca))

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