

## PERTUSSIS FACT SHEET

### **What is pertussis?**

Pertussis is an infection of the upper respiratory tract. It is caused by bacteria named *Bordetella pertussis*.

### **What are symptoms of pertussis?**

Illness starts out like the common cold: low fever, runny nose, sneezing, and mild cough that increases in severity. As the cough continues, it worsens and is described as fits of coughing. Individuals may gag and vomit at the end of these fits. These coughing fits occur mostly at night. The characteristic whoop may or may not be heard.

### **If I have been around someone with whooping cough will I get sick?**

It depends on the type of contact you had with the sick person. Pertussis is spread to others by contact with mucus from the nose and throat of an infected person. For example, coughing and sneezing causes droplets of mucus to be sprayed into the air. Persons are the most infectious when they are having the "cold-like" symptoms and up to 3 weeks after the onset of severe coughing.

Vaccinated individuals can get pertussis, but it is usually milder. Both vaccine-acquired and infection-acquired immunity to pertussis decreases over time, so following vaccine recommendations is important. Teens and adults can and do get whooping cough.

### **How soon after being around someone with pertussis would I become ill?**

The time between your exposure and the time you become ill is called the incubation period. The incubation period for pertussis is commonly 7-10 days, but can be up to 21 days.

### **How long will I be sick?**

This depends on several factors: age, general state of health prior to infection, vaccination status and any complications that may occur from illness. Symptoms, especially coughing, usually last for 1-2 months, but can be longer.

### **What are the complications?**

Pertussis can be very serious in infants under the age of 1. Infants who are born prematurely or who have lung disease are at the highest risk for serious complications. Serious complications in infants and young children include pneumonia, convulsions, apnea, diseases of the brain, and even death.

### **How is pertussis treated?**

Persons with pertussis need to take antibiotics. Some children may require hospitalization. If you are a close contact to the person with pertussis, vaccination or preventative antibiotics may be recommended. Infected individuals are contagious until they complete the prescribed antibiotics, which usually takes 5 days.

### **Is pertussis preventable?**

The most effective way to prevent serious illness from pertussis is vaccination. Vaccinated children and adults can get pertussis, but it is usually milder than illness in unvaccinated individuals. Children younger than 7 years old need a total of 5 doses of pertussis containing vaccine to be considered protected. The vaccine used to prevent pertussis is given as one shot, and also protects against tetanus and diphtheria (DTaP). The recommended schedule for DTaP is at 2, 4, 6 and 15-18 months and another dose at 4-6 years old.

**What about a vaccine for pre-teens, teens and adults?**

The vaccine for individuals age 7 and older is Tdap, which also offers protection against pertussis, diphtheria and tetanus. Adolescents 11 through 18 years of age (preferably at age 11-12 years) should receive a single dose of **Tdap**. One dose of Tdap is also recommended for adults 19 years of age and older who did not get Tdap as an adolescent. Expectant mothers should **receive Tdap during each pregnancy, preferably at 27 through 36 weeks**. Tdap should also be given to 7-10 year olds who are not fully immunized against pertussis.

For more information please contact Contra Costa Public Health at 925-313-6740 and visit our website at <http://cchealth.org/pertussis/>