

Whooping cough (Pertussis) Information

Today, November 12, 2008 we were notified of a positive case of whooping cough in the 5th grade. This child has siblings in other grades that have NOT been diagnosed as of this time. We are also performing infection control cleaning daily.

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a highly contagious bacterial infection of the upper respiratory system. The infection causes irritation in breathing passages, resulting in severe coughing spells. The illness can have three distinct stages and can last months.

The infection easily spreads from person to person through respiratory secretions or mucus, which can be emitted during coughing or sneezing. The incubation period is about 7 to 14 days, meaning that symptoms start about 1 to 2 weeks after exposure to the bacteria.

Stage 1: Cold like symptoms-such as sneezing, runny nose, mild coughing, watery eyes, and sometimes a mild fever-last from several days to 2 weeks. **An infected person is most contagious during this stage.**

Stage 2: Cold like symptoms fade, but the cough gets worse. It changes from a dry, hacking cough to bursts of uncontrollable, often violent coughing. During a coughing episode, it may be temporarily impossible to take a breath because of the intensity and repetition of coughs. When finally able to breathe, the person may take in a sudden gasp of air through airways narrowed by inflammation, and this sometimes causes a whooping noise. Vomiting and severe exhaustion often follow a coughing spell. But between coughing episodes, the infected person often appears normal. This is the most serious stage of whooping cough, usually lasting from 2 to 4 weeks or longer.

Stage 3: Although the person improves and gains strength, the cough may become louder and sound worse. Coughing spells may occur off and on for weeks to months and may flare up if a cold or other upper respiratory illness develops. This final stage may last longer in people who have never received the whooping cough vaccine.

The severity of symptoms is, in part, influenced by whether a person was immunized against whooping cough and how long ago the immunization was given. The protection against whooping cough provided by the vaccine wears off over time.

How is whooping cough diagnosed? A person with whooping cough may appear normal between coughing episodes, which often delays a diagnosis or makes it more difficult. But a doctor may suspect whooping cough during an exam when symptoms are present and recent cases have been reported in the community. Sometimes other coughing illnesses, such as the common cold or bronchitis, have specific symptoms that can distinguish them from whooping cough, such as a high fever, a sore throat, or wheezing. Your physician will know the types of testing used to confirm the disease.

A doctor may collect mucus from the nasopharynx and have it tested for specific types of bacteria that cause whooping cough. Lab results may not be available for up to 10 to 14 days. If whooping cough is:

How is it treated? Whooping cough is treated with antibiotics (Azithromycin-or Z-Pack), primarily to help reduce the spread of infection. If given during the very early stage of the illness, antibiotics may help shorten the illness. Over-the-counter medicines have not been shown to help relieve symptoms, but other measures, such as a cool-air humidifier, may help reduce discomfort.

Can it be prevented? You can prevent whooping cough infection or reduce its severity in your child by keeping immunizations up to date. The routine immunizations DTaP (for children) and Tdap (for adolescents and adults) protect against whooping cough. It is also helpful to wash your hands frequently and keep children away from people who have a bad cough.

Tdap. Combination booster vaccines (for pertussis, diphtheria, and tetanus), known as Tdap, are available for people ages 10 to 64. (Until recently, no vaccine was available for pertussis after age 6.) A booster dose of Tdap is recommended for adolescents ages 11 to 12.¹ And any teen, adult, or health professional who expects to have close contact with a baby less than 1 year old should also get a shot.

When to return to school? Those who receive treatment because they have the disease should not return to school until after at least 5 days after the start of treatment. If you live with someone who has whooping cough you should not return to school until after at least 5 days of treatment.

If you have any further questions here is the link to the Nebraska Health and Human Services information on whooping cough is www.douglascountyhealth.com/disease/pertussis.html. It is best to consult your MD for how to treat your child.