



Protecting Your Baby from Pertussis

What is Pertussis (Whooping Cough)?

Pertussis is a respiratory illness that is easily spread by coughing and sneezing. The disease starts like the common cold, with runny nose or congestion, sneezing, and mild cough or fever. After 1-2 weeks, severe coughing begins. Infants and children with the disease cough violently and rapidly, over and over, until the air is gone from their lungs and they're forced to inhale with a loud "whooping" sound. The coughing can last for weeks, even months. Adults and adolescents typically have a milder form of pertussis; however, they can still easily spread the infection to others, including infants and young children. Pertussis is most severe for babies that are not old enough for vaccination. More than half of infants less than 1 year of age who get the disease must be hospitalized, and some die from it.

How does pertussis (Whooping Cough) spread?

Pertussis easily spreads from person to person, family member to family member through coughing and sneezing. Family members can unknowingly spread pertussis to the most vulnerable, such as unvaccinated babies.

Why be Concerned?

Pertussis activity is on the rise in the United States and here in Michigan. The good news is that pertussis is preventable and the public can protect themselves through vaccination. In Michigan, this increase was first observed in 2008, with 315 cases reported. The rise in cases has continued. In 2009, there were 902 reported cases and in 2010, there were 1,564 cases reported.

How can Pertussis be Prevented?

The best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated. Make sure infants and young children get their recommended five shots on time. Protection from the childhood vaccine fades over time. Adolescents and adults need to be revaccinated, even if they were completely vaccinated as children. Adults should ask their doctor about the Tdap vaccine that includes a tetanus and diphtheria booster and also protects against whooping cough. This is especially important for families with new infants. Families with new infants or are expecting an infant should consider vaccinating teenagers, grandparents, and close family friends that will be in contact with the infant.

Talk to your doctor for Tdap vaccine information. Remind everyone to cover their mouths when coughing and to wash their hands often.



North Ottawa Community Health System