

**MONROE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
DISEASE CONTROL UNIT 753-5164**

**Pertussis
(whooping cough)**

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, or whooping cough as it is more commonly known, is a contagious disease involving the respiratory tract. It is caused by a bacterium that is found in the mouth, nose and throat of an infected person.

Who gets pertussis?

Pertussis can occur at any age. Although most of the reported cases occur in children, the incidence of pertussis in adolescents and adults has been increasing in recent years.

Infants who become ill with Pertussis are at risk for more severe disease.

How is pertussis spread?

Pertussis is primarily spread by direct contact with discharges from the nose and throat of infected persons. Occasionally transmission can occur following contact with freshly contaminated articles from an infected person. An older sibling or parent who is ill may bring the disease home and infect others in the household.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Pertussis begins as a mild upper respiratory infection. Initially, symptoms resemble those of a common cold, including sneezing, runny nose, low-grade fever and a mild cough. Within two weeks the cough becomes more severe and can be characterized by episodes of numerous, rapid coughs followed by a crowing or high pitched whoop. A thick, clear mucous may be discharged. These episodes may recur for up to two months, and are more frequent at night. Older persons or partially immunized children generally have milder symptoms.

How soon after infection do symptoms appear?

The incubation period is 5 to 21 days, usually 7-10 days.

When and for how long is a person able to spread pertussis?

A person can transmit pertussis from onset of symptoms to three weeks after the onset of the cough. A person is most infectious during the beginning of the illness when symptoms resemble those of a common cold and for the first two weeks after cough onset. A person is no longer considered infectious after taking appropriate antibiotics for five days.

What are the complications associated with pertussis?

Complications of pertussis may include pneumonia, middle ear infection, anorexia, dehydration, seizures, encephalopathy (disorders of the brain), apneic episodes (brief cessation of breathing) and death.

MONROE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

DISEASE CONTROL UNIT 753-5164

What is the vaccine for pertussis?

The vaccine for pertussis is usually given in combination with diphtheria and tetanus. A vaccine with acellular pertussis component is now used in the United States. Immunization authorities recommend that DtaP (diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis) vaccine be given at 2,4,6 and 12-15 months of age and between 4 and 6 years. A booster dose of Tdap (Tetanus, diphtheria and acellular Pertussis) is recommended at 11-12 years of age.

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of pertussis?

- The single most effective control measure is maintaining the highest possible level of immunization in the community.
- Treatment of cases with certain antibiotics can shorten the contagious period.
- People who have or may have pertussis should stay away from young children and infants until properly treated.

Should people who have been in contact with a diagnosed case of pertussis be treated?

Certain antibiotics are effective in eliminating the germ from the nose and throat. Household contacts, day care contacts and other close contacts may need antibiotics for preventive treatment.