

Whooping cough update:

The Department of Health of Vermont has reported at least 7 cases in Chittenden county as of November 23rd, 2011.

# Pertussis

Pertussis (whooping cough) is very contagious and can cause serious illness especially in infants too young to be fully vaccinated. Make sure your children get their [recommended shots](#) on time. Teen and adult vaccination is also important, especially for families with newborns.

Clinical information is also available [for health care providers](#).

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## What is pertussis?

Commonly known as whooping cough, pertussis is an acute disease of the respiratory system (lungs). It is caused by a bacterium. People can get pertussis at any age and at any time of the year. It is contagious and symptoms range from mild to severe. Serious complications are most common among children under one year old, including pneumonia, encephalopathy (brain inflammation), and in rare cases, death.

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## What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Pertussis often begins gradually with cold-like symptoms and an irritating cough. Severe coughing spells develop, followed by whoops, which can lead to the ill person turning blue or having trouble catching his or her breath, and sometimes vomiting after coughing. The coughing may occur several times a day and last from four to six weeks.

These severe symptoms are most common in young children. Adults, older children and infants under 6 months may not develop typical symptoms.

People who have pertussis usually have normal or only slightly elevated temperatures.

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## **How do people get pertussis?**

Transmission of the bacterium occurs by direct contact with the respiratory discharges of an infected person. Generally, several hours of close contact with an infected person are necessary to spread the disease.

Symptoms usually start about seven to 10 days after exposure to an infected individual. In some cases, symptoms begin as late as 20 days after exposure. An infected individual who has received no treatment is contagious from the beginning of early symptoms until three weeks after the coughing spasms start. When a person is given antibiotics, the infectious period lasts for five days from the start of treatment.

## **Who is at risk of getting pertussis?**

Individuals at greatest risk of getting pertussis are children who have not received pertussis vaccine (usually given in the DTaP/Tdap shot), or who have not been fully immunized. Children whose immunizations are up-to-date can occasionally get pertussis, but they are more likely to have milder symptoms. The effectiveness of pertussis vaccine decreases over time so teenagers and adults who were fully immunized as children do not have full protection from pertussis. Anyone who has definitely had pertussis is well protected from getting it again.

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## **What tests are available for diagnosing pertussis?**

Your health care provider can perform tests to help confirm the diagnosis of pertussis. A sample of mucus is taken from the back of the nose with a swab and sent to the Department of Health Laboratory for testing. Negative test results do not rule out the possibility of pertussis, especially in the person who has the symptoms.

## **How is pertussis treated?**

Treatment with antibiotics, if started early in the illness, may help reduce the severity of the symptoms. Treatment also decreases the contagiousness of the person who is ill and helps control the spread of the disease.

When an individual has pertussis, all household members and other close contacts (for example, day

care contacts or overnight guests) should receive preventive treatment with antibiotics. This treatment can help prevent people from becoming ill.

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## Is pertussis preventable?

Immunization against pertussis usually prevents this disease in children. Five doses of DTaP vaccine are recommended for children at age 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 15 months and between 4 to 6 years, prior to school entry. Tdap booster vaccine is recommended for adolescents and for all adults who have not received a dose.

Basic hygiene measures can also help control the spread of pertussis. Wash hands regularly, dispose of tissues properly and don't cough or sneeze on others. Teach children to take these precautions at home and at school. Also, keep babies away from people who are coughing.

**If you think you or a family member might have pertussis, contact your health care provider. For further information about pertussis, call the Vermont Department of Health, Epidemiology Field Unit, 1-800-640-4374 or 863-7240.**

New Dept. of Health guidelines state that children should have 5 Tdap, 2 Varicella, 3 Hepatitis, 4PCV's, 2 MMR's, 4HIB, 4 IPV Immunizations by the time they are 6yrs old. The only remaining immunization would be a Tdap before entering the 7th grade:

**Provide vaccination.** One dose of the Tdap vaccine is recommended for people 11 years and older. There is no minimal time interval between doses of Td and Tdap. Vaccinating adolescents and adults, especially family members or caregivers of infants and health care workers, can help prevent pertussis transmission to infants too young to be vaccinated. For questions regarding immunizations, please contact the Immunization Program (802-863-7240).

The following sites can be accessed for any questions or concerns on this matter:

[CDC Pertussis Resources\(exit VDH\)](#)

<http://healthvermont.gov/prevent/pertussis/Pertussis.aspx>

Please feel free to call either health office with any questions at The Milton Elementary , Middle or High School.

Stay well,

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