

Whooping Cough (Pertussis) and the Importance of Childhood Vaccination

Symptoms of whooping cough

Whooping cough (also known as pertussis) can cause these symptoms:



Coughing fits



Difficulty breathing



Blue or purplish skin,
due to pauses in breathing



Mild fever (less than 100.4 degrees)

Coughing can start 1 to 2 weeks after being exposed to the bacteria, and can last up to 10 weeks or more.

Babies and young children may not cough but can still struggle to breathe.

How serious is whooping cough?

Whooping cough is most dangerous for babies and young children. In fact, babies younger than 1 year old who have whooping cough may:



Be hospitalized



Develop pneumonia (a serious lung infection)



Have seizures (jerking, twitching of the muscles, or staring)



Suffer brain damage

The younger the baby, the more likely they'll need hospital treatment.

Whooping cough can even be deadly.

How is whooping cough spread?

Whooping cough is a very contagious bacterial infection.

Whooping cough spreads when a person infected with whooping cough **breathes, coughs, or sneezes.**

A person with whooping cough can **spread the disease from the very beginning of the sickness** (when they have cold-like symptoms) and for at least 2 weeks after coughing starts.

Since symptoms can be mild for some people, **your baby can catch whooping cough** from parents, grandparents, or older brothers or sisters who don't know they have the disease.



Whooping cough cases in the United States

Whooping cough cases are still reported in the United States. From year to year, the number of whooping cough cases can range from roughly between **10,000** and **50,000**. Cases of whooping cough have been increasing since the 1990s, and outbreaks of whooping cough can occur.

Before vaccinations were recommended for all babies, **up to 9,000** people in the United States died from whooping cough each year. Today, because of vaccination, **fewer than 20** people die from whooping cough each year.

Vaccination is important

Vaccination is the best way to protect against whooping cough. There are two vaccines that help protect children and preteens against whooping cough: **DTaP** and **Tdap**. Both also help protect against diphtheria and tetanus.

CDC recommends that your child get **five doses of the DTaP vaccine** for best protection. Your child will need one dose at each of the following ages:

2 MONTHS	4 MONTHS	6 MONTHS	15–18 MONTHS	4–6 YEARS
--------------------	--------------------	--------------------	------------------------	---------------------

CDC recommends that your preteen get **one dose of the Tdap vaccine at age 11 through 12 years**.



CDC recommends pregnant people get a Tdap vaccine during each pregnancy to pass protection to babies before they're born. This helps protect babies until they're old enough to get vaccinated themselves.

Side effects from the DTaP or Tdap vaccines are rare and usually mild

Most children don't have any side effects from the vaccine. The side effects that do occur are usually mild and may include:

- **Soreness, redness, or swelling** where the shot was given
- **Fever**
- **Feeling tired**
- **Irritability (fussiness)**
- **Loss of appetite**
- **Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or stomachache**
- **Headache**

More serious side effects are rare. These may include high fever that could cause a seizure.



Febrile seizures can be frightening, but nearly all children who have them recover quickly. Febrile seizures are not considered to cause any permanent harm or have any lasting effects.



Make sure your child is up to date on all recommended vaccinations.

To learn more, talk to your child's healthcare provider and visit CDC's website.

Learn more about whooping cough:



View vaccine schedules:

