



# Just the Facts

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## ...About Whooping Cough (Pertussis)



Whooping cough (pertussis) is an infection caused by bacteria. It can be prevented by vaccination.

The infection usually begins with a runny nose and cough. Soon, the cough becomes more frequent and severe. After a coughing attack, the child may give a loud whoop when breathing in, which is why the infection is called whooping cough. During the attack, the child may become blue in the face. Afterwards, the child will often vomit.

It takes a long time for children to get over whooping cough. They are usually sick for 6 to 10 weeks. The disease is most severe in infants less than 1 year of age, many of whom are so sick that they have to be cared for in a hospital.

Whooping cough spreads very easily from person to person in the same household or child care facility. The germs spread through the air or by touch. People with whooping cough can spread germs from the time they get the infection until up to three weeks after the coughing attack starts. It takes from 7 to 10 days to come down with whooping cough after coming in contact with someone else who has it.

Whooping cough can be prevented with a vaccine called DPT because it prevents diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough) and tetanus (lock-jaw). Sometimes the vaccination also includes the polio vaccine. Fever, crying, sleepiness, and pain or

swelling at the site of the injection occur in some children after the DPT vaccine. **The risk of complications from whooping cough in infants is much greater than the risks from the vaccine.**

A child who has not been vaccinated and catches the infection can be treated with an antibiotic. The child will have to take this medication for two weeks. The medication can help prevent the infection from spreading to others, as well as help the child get better.

### THINGS PARENTS CAN DO

- ◆ Check your child's immunization record to see if he or she has had whooping cough or the DPT vaccine if another child has whooping cough.
- ◆ Watch your child for signs of whooping cough.
- ◆ Contact your physician or the Preventive Medicine Service to find out if your child should receive the whooping cough vaccine or an antibiotic.
- ◆ If your child has whooping cough, do not return your child to the child care facility until he or she has taken the antibiotic for at least five days and a physician has cleared your child to return. If no treatment is given, your child must be excluded for three weeks.

**Whooping cough can be prevented by immunization.**

- ◆ Child Care Facilities
- ◆ Information/Guidance
- ◆ Immunization

*For additional information contact your local health consultant or health care provider.*