

# Pertussis or Whooping Cough Vaccine Recommendation for Adolescents

*[Announce]*) This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC - safer, healthier people.

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a highly contagious respiratory illness caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*. Since the 1970s, pertussis cases have increased in adolescents and adults. Protection offered by the childhood pertussis vaccine can diminish as children grow into adulthood. Protection can also decrease after being infected with pertussis. Pertussis is spread from person to person. When an infected person sneezes or coughs, tiny droplets containing pertussis bacteria move through the air. In 2005, two-thirds of the total cases in the U.S. were among adolescents. Adolescents and adults are often the source of spreading pertussis to family members, including infants. Because infants are too young to be fully protected by vaccination, they are at risk for severe or fatal pertussis.

In adolescents and adults, pertussis ranges from mild cough illness to classic or severe pertussis. Classic pertussis consists of a runny nose, followed by a prolonged cough, coupled with whoops or vomiting. When the symptoms are not “classic” it can be difficult to distinguish pertussis from other cough illnesses. Often, the disease is passed from person-to-person even before the coughing starts.

Even though it’s rarely fatal in older adolescents and adults, pertussis can be very serious. It can produce coughing fits that last for several weeks and even months. The cough can disturb sleep and cause vomiting, broken ribs, a feeling of suffocation, and other complications. Pertussis can be so severe that adolescents miss significant amounts of school or become unable to participate in sports or other social activities. Parents may have to miss work in order to take care of their sick adolescent, and they may also become infected. Hospitalizations related to complicated pertussis are necessary in up to 2 percent of adolescents and 5 percent of adults. The best way to prevent pertussis is through a booster dose of pertussis vaccine.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, also known as the ACIP, recommends a single dose of Tdap vaccine - or Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis - to protect against pertussis. The ACIP recommends that adolescents 11 and 12 years of age receive Tdap. Ideally, Tdap is given during the 11to12 year old health visit or at the earliest opportunity. The ACIP also recommends that adults receive Tdap in place of their next tetanus booster.

In addition to protecting from pertussis, Tdap is also a booster dose for diphtheria and tetanus. All three infections are caused by bacteria. Diphtheria and pertussis are spread from person-to-person, and tetanus is widely found in the environment, entering the body through cuts or wounds.

Parents often wonder why a booster dose for pertussis is recommended for their adolescent. Protection from some childhood vaccines can wear off. The protection from childhood

vaccination against pertussis is not life long. The booster will help adolescents continue to be protected.

Side effects from the Tdap are usually mild, such as fever; headache; or pain, soreness, swelling, or redness where the shot was given. Healthcare providers should discuss the side effects with parents before giving the shot.

For families with health insurance, all or most of the cost of the vaccine is usually covered. Children age 18 and younger may be eligible to get the vaccines at no cost through the Vaccines for Children, or VFC, program if they're Medicaid eligible, uninsured, American Indian, or Alaska native. Parents can find a VFC provider by contacting their local health department.

For more information about vaccines for adolescents, please visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/preteens](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/preteens).

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