

Sounds of pertussis (whooping cough).

I'm doctor Thomas Wisner. I'm the medical epidemiologist for the Portland Area Indian Health Service. And I wanted to share some information with you about pertussis.

Many people ask, what is pertussis and is it serious? But pertussis is also known as whooping cough and it's a disease that can cause severe coughing and breathing problems, especially in infants. It can be prevented by vaccination. In 2010 there were over 27,000 reported cases in the US and these resulted in 27 deaths. More than half of the children under one year of age who get pertussis will end up in the hospital.

How do I keep from getting pertussis? The best way to prevent pertussis is through vaccination. All infants should be vaccinated with the DTaP vaccine, which stands for diphtheria, tetanus, and acellular pertussis. Infants should get their first dose at 6 to 8 weeks, a second dose at 3 to 4 months, and a third dose at six months. A fourth dose is usually given between 15 to 18 months, but can be given as early as 12 months. The fifth booster dose is given at school age between 4 and 6 years. Children who did not get all five DTaP doses should receive the Tdap vaccine starting at age seven. Tdap is usually given to all pre-teens between the ages of 10 and 12. It's a booster for pertussis, as well as tetanus and diphtheria. Adults should also receive the Tdap vaccine, especially pregnant women after the 20th week of pregnancy, parents and other caregivers for infants and small children, health care workers, and elders, those who are ages 65 and over.

How do you tell if someone has pertussis? If you or your child has a cough for more than two weeks, they should be seen by a health care provider to make sure they do not have pertussis. Symptoms of pertussis start like the common cold. Runny nose, sneezing, cough, and mild fever. After one to two weeks severe cough begins. The cough starts and stops in fits or spells. During a coughing spell it may be hard to catch one's breath. After one of these spells, the child may make a loud whooping sound as they try to take in a deep breath before the next coughing spell begins. For infants, the coughing may be so severe that they turn blue or stop breathing, which is called apnea. For very young babies, fussiness, poor feeding, and spells of apnea may be the first signs of pertussis. If you think your baby has an apnea spell, where it stops breathing for even a short while, seek medical attention right away or call 911. Older children, adolescents, and adults usually have a milder illness, but they still need to be treated.

Special tests can be done to tell if someone has pertussis. These tests are done by placing a swab in a child or adult's nose, and for babies the inside of the nose is washed out with salt water and the fluid is collected in a small tube.

Can pertussis be treated? Pertussis can be treated with antibiotics. It is important to take all of the antibiotics that are prescribed and to stay home from school or work for at least five days after treatment is started, even if the person is feeling better. People who have been exposed to someone with pertussis should also be treated to prevent them from getting the disease, even if they've been vaccinated.

How is pertussis spread? Pertussis is spread by someone with the disease when they cough or sneeze. The bacteria that causes pertussis then gets into the air in tiny droplets that can spread to anyone close by. People who have not been vaccinated, especially newborns who are too young to receive the vaccine are most likely to be infected and have severe illness. Adolescents and young adults who have

not received a Tdap booster are the most likely sources for many of the pertussis infections that happen nowadays.

Is the DTaP vaccine safe? The DTaP vaccine is very safe and effective at preventing disease. Some people may have side effects from the vaccine but severe side effects are very rare: less than 1 out of 1,000,000 children. These may include fever over 105 degrees, crying for more than 3 hours, or seizures. 1 out of every 4 children may have some redness or swelling or pain at the site of the shot, and a few may have fever or vomiting. Make sure you and your family members are protected from getting pertussis. Get vaccinated. Get the DTap vaccine, D-T-a-P, for infants and children and get the Tdap vaccine for adolescents and adults.