

## whooping cough (pertussis)

### WHAT IS WHOOPING COUGH?

Whooping cough (Pertussis) is a disease caused by a bacteria (not a virus) which infects the nose, throat and chest. It usually begins like a common cold; slight fever, runny nose, sneezing and a dry cough which steadily gets worse over the first week.

As the cough worsens, it comes in waves or spasms so that it is difficult to get a breath between coughs and when the air does go in, there is a harsh sound of crowing noise called a whoop. A coughing spasm often ends with vomiting or gagging. These coughing spasms usually stop or slow down after three weeks, but coughing can last as long as six to ten weeks.

For infants under one year, whooping cough is a very serious illness. Infants often do no whoop, but will turn blue because they cannot get their breath and can stop breathing. A small number of infants will develop pneumonia or have seizures.

### HOW DOES IT SPREAD?

Whooping cough spreads rapidly within families, classrooms (daycare, kindergarten or school) and at work, where people are in groups. One catches the disease from others, the same way as colds spread – from droplets released in the air when people cough or blow their noses.

### WHO CAN GET IT?

Newborns and infants under one year, adolescents and young children who were never fully immunized, are very susceptible to the disease.

In people who have not been immunized, over 90% of exposed individuals will acquire infection and disease. The period of time between becoming infected (being exposed or in contact) with the bacteria and starting to get symptoms, such as a cough and runny nose, is usually between 7 and 10 days and not exceeding 21 days.

### HOW TO PREVENT IT?

Immunization with pertussis vaccine is recommended for all children under 7 years of age. Infants cannot be considered immune until they have at least three doses of vaccine which

are routinely given at two, four, and six months. A full course of immunization (five doses) will produce immunity in 80% of individuals. Immunization is not usually given after 7 years of age.

### WHAT TREATMENT IS AVAILABLE FOR CASES OF PERTUSSIS?

Treatment of cases involves a ten-day course of Erythromycin (Ilosone, EES) unless symptoms have been present for more than three weeks. Cases will be excluded from schools, daycare or other settings until they have received five days of Erythromycin, OR for three weeks from the onset of symptoms, OR until they have stopped coughing, whichever comes first.

### WHAT ARE THE PRECAUTIONS FOR CONTACT (EXPOSED INDIVIDUALS)?

Erythromycin is recommended for all close contacts, such as household contact, daycare and classroom contact. Children with cold symptoms and a bad cough should not attend school until they have been assessed by a physician. Although whooping cough in older children is not considered life threatening, Erythromycin is recommended, since anyone in close contact can get the disease, even if they have been immunized, Erythromycin may also be effective in preventing the disease from spreading further into the community.

*Rate My Medical Doctor is North America's premier online rating site. We provide everyone with an opportunity to write reviews on their experience under the care of a medical professional. The information provided within this sheet is not to be implied as medical advice nor should it be used for prognosis, diagnosing, or administering treatment, always follow the instructions of your medical professional.*