



Island County Public Health

Communicable Disease Program

Pertussis

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

- because you or your child may have been exposed to pertussis.** [Please note: Individuals who have been exposed to pertussis who have close contact with infants under the age of 1 year, those who are pregnant or with people with pre-existing health conditions that put them at risk for severe illness or complications should receive Postexposure Prophylaxis (PEP), regardless of immunization status. Please notify a medical provider and request PEP, it should be implemented as soon as possible and within 21 days of last exposure to the infectious case.] **If you believe your child has pertussis, contact your healthcare provider. Notify your childcare provider or school if a diagnosis of pertussis is made.**
- for informational purposes only.**

What is pertussis?

Pertussis is a very contagious infection that causes a coughing illness. It is caused by bacteria (germs) that are found in the mouth, nose, and throat of an infected person. Pertussis is also known as whooping cough.

What are symptoms of pertussis?

The illness begins with cold-like symptoms, such as a runny nose, sore throat, and mild cough. Within 1-2 weeks, the cough becomes more severe, and leads to coughing fits, difficulty in getting one's breath, mucus production, vomiting following coughing, and a "whooping" sound while struggling to inhale after coughing. Fever is usually absent, and people often do not appear ill between coughing fits. The disease may last 6-10 weeks or longer. Pertussis is most dangerous in infants less than 6 months of age, and serious complications can occur.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms appear between 4-21 days after exposure, usually 7-10 days.

How is pertussis spread?

The bacteria are found in the nose and throat of an ill person and are spread through droplets when infected people cough, sneeze, or talk. The greatest risk of spread is during the early stage when it appears to be a "cold".

Who may become ill with pertussis?

Pertussis can occur at any age regardless of vaccine status. Severe illness is more common in infants and young children who either have never been vaccinated or who have not received the full series of vaccines. Many cases occur in older children and adults because protection from the vaccine lasts only 5 to 10 years after the last dose.

How long is a person infectious (contagious)?

Without antibiotic treatment, a person is contagious for up to 3 weeks after the start of coughing fits. If treated with antibiotics, then the ill person is contagious until 5 days after treatment begins even though the cough may continue.

How is pertussis treated?

Antibiotics, preferably azithromycin, erythromycin, and clarithromycin are used to treat the disease. During this time, the ill individual should remain at home to reduce the spread of the disease. Treatment is completed when the full course of prescribed antibiotic has been taken.

How can pertussis be prevented?

The vaccination against pertussis is included in the DTaP, DTP and Tdap vaccines. Pertussis is the "P" part of the vaccine. Children less than 7 years of age should get 5 doses of the DTaP/DTP vaccine at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 15-18 months, and at 4-6 years of age. Children who are 7-9 years of age should get vaccinated with Tdap if they did not complete their primary series. Adolescents and adults 10 years and older should get one booster dose of Tdap if they have not previously received a Tdap. Pregnant women should be immunized during the late second or third trimester of each pregnancy to help protect their newborn infants irrespective of prior history of receiving Tdap. Consult your health care provider if you have vaccine questions.

Pertussis is a Washington State reportable disease and must be reported to your local health department. In Island County, contact Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response at 360-678-2301, Monday through Friday, 8 AM–4:30PM

When does a child need to stay home from childcare or school?

A child should not attend childcare or school if one or more of the following applies:

- Fever (defined as temperature above 100.4°F)
- Vomiting, sore throat, excessive coughing
- Does not feel well enough to participate in classroom activities

Adapted from materials developed by Snohomish County Health Department.

References

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention: [Pertussis \(Whooping Cough\) | Whooping Cough | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/)
- Washington Department of Health: <https://doh.wa.gov/public-health-provider-resources/notifiable-conditions/pertussis>
- Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/whooping-cough/symptoms-causes/syc-20378973>
- Child Care Health Program – Public Health Seattle & King County: <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/health/child-teen-health/child-care-health/disease-prevention.aspx>.
- Child Care Health Outreach – Snohomish County Health Department: [Disease Fact Sheets for Child Care Providers | Snohomish County Health Department, WA \(snohd.org\)](https://snohd.org/2020/03/03/disease-fact-sheets-for-child-care-providers/)

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