

Health Tips for Parents

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Who needs the pertussis vaccination?

California is again experiencing an epidemic of pertussis (whooping cough). The increase in pertussis is due to greater awareness, better diagnostic tests and less effective DTaP vaccines.



Pertussis is a bacterial infection of the respiratory system. It is highly contagious and can spread from person-to-person through tiny drops of fluid from an infected person's nose or mouth. Pertussis occurs in persons of all ages but is particularly severe and frequently fatal in infants less than 4 months of age. The most common source of infection in a young infant is from an adult family member with pertussis who has not been correctly diagnosed.



respiratory system. It is highly contagious and can spread from person-to-person through tiny drops of fluid from an infected person's nose

of age. All pregnant women (27 to 36 weeks gestation) should protect themselves and their unborn child by getting the Tdap vaccination prior to birth.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Pertussis. Pertussis in young infants starts with a runny nose and mild cough, with no fever. Since symptoms are mild, the diagnosis is often delayed. If pertussis is suspected, the doctor may take a sample of mucus from the back of the child's nose to test for the presence of the pertussis bacterium. Blood tests and a chest X-ray may be ordered. In adults, a blood antibody test is used to make the diagnosis.

Early diagnosis in both children and adults is important because the illness can be shortened by specific medications. Young infants with pertussis will usually require hospital admission, often in a pediatric intensive care unit. The diagnosis of pertussis should be considered in all young infants with runny nose, cough and no fever.

Vaccination. UCLA pediatric infectious diseases specialist James D. Cherry MD, MSc, stresses the importance of vaccination. Today, kids receive a series of the pertussis-containing vaccine, called DTaP (Diphtheria, Tetanus and Acellular Pertussis), which is given in five doses (6 weeks, 4, 6 and 15 months, and sometime between 4 and 6 years of age), and is followed by the Tdap vaccine at between 10 and 12 years

Symptoms of whooping cough:

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Minimal or no fever
- Coughing that usually worsens over a two- to four-week period
- "Whooping" sound when taking a breath
- Vomiting following a cough episode
- Child often turns red or purple when coughing



Getting the Proper Care

In addition to making sure their child gets the proper care, parents should be vigilant about protecting other children. Dr. Cherry stresses, "Children, pre-adolescents, all pregnant women and selected adults need to get vaccinated."

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