

Whooping Cough Is on the Rise

Whooping cough (pertussis) is an illness that affects the lungs. It is very contagious and very serious.

Whooping cough starts off like a common cold (runny nose, sneezing, mild cough, and, sometimes, a low fever). After a week or so, the cold symptoms go away, but the severe coughing begins.

Children are more likely than adults to have severe coughing “fits.” These coughing fits may be so forceful they cause spasms and vomiting. The coughing fits often last for a minute or more. The person having a coughing fit may turn red or purple. In between the coughing fits, the person usually feels okay. It may take six weeks—or even longer—to finally get rid of the cough.



Why Is It Called Whooping Cough?

Whooping cough gets its name from the sound most children make when they breathe in during coughing. Coughing fits are so hard and rapid that all of the air leaves the lungs, forcing the child to inhale with a loud, high-pitched “whooping” sound. Symptoms for teens and adults may be fairly mild, and they may not “whoop” when they cough. Infants also may not cough or whoop. Instead, they may get red in the face and look as if they’re gasping for air. Some infants may actually stop breathing for a few seconds.

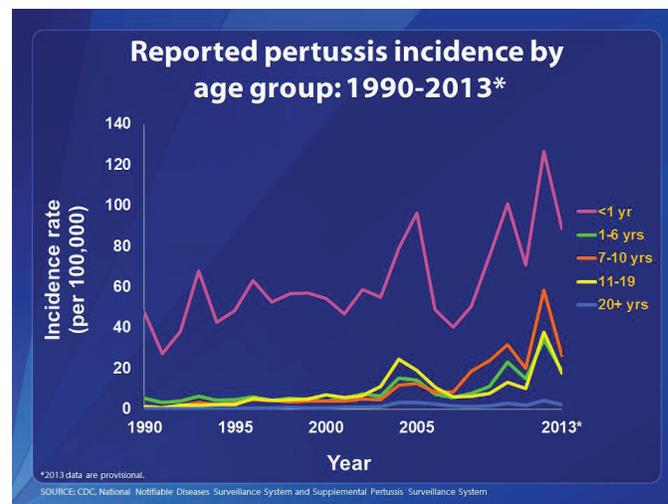
Whooping Cough Is Serious

Whooping cough is very serious for infants and young children. Three out of four infants younger than six months who contract whooping cough will need to be hospitalized. Infants and younger children are at greatest risk for dying from whooping cough. Most older children and adults who get whooping cough will get better without needing to go to the hospital.

Before a vaccine was available, up to 10,000 people, mostly infants and young children, died from whooping cough every year in the United States. After vaccination became available, deaths fell to about 30 every year. By the 1970s, whooping cough was almost eliminated in the United States. The lowest number of reported cases (1010) was in 1976.

Whooping Cough Is on the Rise

However, whooping cough began to rise in the 1980s. In recent years, between 10,000 and 40,000 cases are reported each year to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). In 2012, more than 48,000 cases of whooping cough were reported to the CDC. But many cases of whooping cough go unreported, so the real number of cases was much higher.

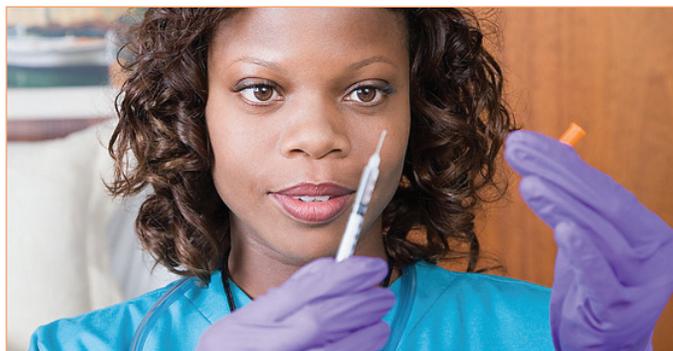


How Whooping Cough Is Spread

Whooping cough is caused by a germ (bacterium). This germ is easily spread from person to person. When a person coughs or sneezes, tiny droplets of fluid containing whooping cough germs can spread through the air.

These droplets may be breathed in by others, and may land on surfaces (such as a door handle, water faucet, or desk). When someone touches a germ surface and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth, the whooping cough germs can get into that person's body.

Many infants get whooping cough from their parents, older brothers or sisters, or other caregivers who might not even know they have the disease. Whooping cough is so contagious that four out of five people in a household who have not been vaccinated will likely get sick.



Prevention

The *best* way to protect yourself and your family from getting whooping cough—or spreading it to others—is to make sure everyone in your family is vaccinated. The vaccinations for whooping cough are DTaP and Tdap. They protect against three diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough).

Children need five DTaP shots. The first three shots are given at two, four, and six months of

age. The fourth shot is given between 15 and 18 months of age. The fifth shot is given when a child enters school, at four to six years of age.

Booster Shots

Protection from the childhood vaccine fades over time. Teens and adults (11 through 64 years of age) need to get “booster” shots, even if they were completely vaccinated as children. Adults should get a Tdap booster vaccine if they haven't already had one.

Protecting Your Unborn Baby

About 30 to 40 percent of babies who get whooping cough catch it from their mother. The CDC now recommends that pregnant women receive the booster shot for whooping cough with each pregnancy. It's better for pregnant women to get the whooping cough vaccine while pregnant than after giving birth. To give their newborn babies the most protection from getting whooping cough, pregnant women should get the vaccine during their 27th through 36th week.

Treatment

Call your health care provider immediately if you suspect that you or your child has whooping cough.

Remember:

- ✓ Children who are not vaccinated run the risk of getting sick for six weeks or longer.
- ✓ Infection in infants can cause death.
- ✓ Children, teens, *and* adults should be vaccinated.

The information provided on this fact sheet is intended for your general knowledge only and is not a substitute for any medical advice or treatment from a health care professional.



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