

CDRS

Communicable Disease Reporting System

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE FACT SHEET

PERTUSSIS

Pertussis, also known as Whooping Cough, is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by the bacteria *Bordatella pertussis*.

Symptoms

- Begins as a mild upper respiratory infection. Early symptoms resemble those of the common cold, including sneezing, runny nose, low-grade fever, and mild cough.
- Progresses within two weeks to a more severe cough. Symptoms now include episodes of numerous rapid coughs followed by a high-pitched “whoop.” These episodes may recur for one to two months and are more frequent at night.
- Some people including young infants, immunized school children, adolescents, and adults, may not have these typical coughing spells.
- Symptoms usually appear 7-10 days after exposure to the bacteria.

Transmission

- Pertussis is primarily spread by direct contact with the discharges from the nose and throat of infected individuals. This includes respiratory, oral, or nasal secretions.
- Respiratory droplets that can spread the illness are released when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks.
- The greatest risk for spread is during the early stages of illness when symptoms resemble the common cold.
- A person can transmit pertussis from the time they begin to show symptoms until three weeks after coughing begins. This time can be reduced to five days after appropriate antibiotic therapy begins.
- A person diagnosed with pertussis must be excluded from school and/or child care center while they can still transmit pertussis.

Treatment

- A person infected with pertussis should receive an appropriate antibiotic to reduce their ability to spread the illness. Azithromycin, erythromycin, and clarithromycin are the preferred antimicrobials for treatment of pertussis, although your physician may prescribe another antibiotic if you cannot take one of these medications.
- Household members and close contacts of a person diagnosed with pertussis will also need to take antibiotics to prevent them from getting pertussis. A close contact is anyone who has had face-to-face contact or shared a confined space for a prolonged period of time with a symptomatic person. Close contacts also include persons who have direct contact with respiratory, oral, or nasal secretions from a symptomatic person.
- In addition to antimicrobials, household and close contacts who have had at least four doses of pertussis vaccine should receive a booster dose (DTaP) unless a dose has been given within the past three years. Ask your physician about what vaccines are available to you.

Additional Information

- Young infants are at the greatest risk for complications, which include mild complications like ear infections, loss of appetite, and dehydration, or serious complications like pneumonia, seizures, brain disorders, and death.
- The most effective control measure for preventing the spread of pertussis is maintaining the highest possible level of immunization in the community.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.

Franklin County



Board of Health

Report Disease With Ease - 24 hours a day

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Columbus and Franklin County Communicable Disease Reporting System

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