

Pertussis is a very contagious disease, characterized by severe coughing, caused by the bacterium *Bordetella Pertussis*. Among vaccine-preventable diseases, pertussis is one of the most common occurring vaccine-preventable diseases in the United States. The disease can be very serious in children less than 1 year of age, elderly, an immune deficiency, or serious chronic condition.

## SYMPTOMS

Early symptoms usually last 7 to 10 days. Early symptoms are like the common cold and include:

- a runny nose
- a low-grade fever
- a cough that slowly gets worse
- or pauses in breathing in infants

Over time the infected person begins to have severe coughing fits. The person may make a high pitched “whooping” sound as they try to catch their breath after a coughing fit. Between spells, the person often appears to be well. Later symptoms may last 2 to 10 weeks and can include:

- coughing fits
- vomiting
- tiredness after coughing fits
- or become blue in the face from lack of air

Pertussis can occur at any age, but is more serious illness for infants and young children who don’t have all their pertussis vaccinations. Over half of all infants under one year who have pertussis are hospitalized. Older children and adults are often the source of infection for infants with whom they have close contact. In adolescents and adults, Pertussis often looks like chronic bronchitis. If you notice any of these symptoms, notify your medical physician or Stokes County Health Department at (336) 593-2400 as soon as possible.

## TREATMENT

Antibiotics given early in the illness prevent severe symptoms. Antibiotics are also given to people who live with the infected person and other close contacts to prevent pertussis. During treatment, children will remain absent from childcare setting or school until 5 days of antibiotics are completed and are well enough to return. Adults during treatment will also refrain from public activities and the workplace for the first 5 days of the full course of antibiotic treatment. Without antibiotics, a person with pertussis is considered to be contagious for three weeks. It is important that ill individuals stay at home away from others, especially infants and young children.

## HOW IT SPREADS

Pertussis spreads easily from person to person when an infected person coughs or sneezes and others who are in close contact breathe in the infected droplets. Pertussis can also be spread by touching a tissue or sharing a cup used by someone with pertussis.

**Stokes County Health Department/Stokes Family Health Center**

1009 Main Street • Danbury, NC 20716 • 336.593.2400

[www.co.stokes.nc.us/health](http://www.co.stokes.nc.us/health)



## VACCINATION

◦ The best way to prevent pertussis is through the pertussis vaccination. The CDC reports that unvaccinated children have eight times the risk for contracting pertussis than do those children who receive the vaccine. Protection against pertussis is found in a combination vaccine that also protects against diphtheria and tetanus (DTaP, Tdap).

**DTaP** is for children younger than 7 years of age. Children need 5 doses of DTaP (at 2, 4, 6, and 15-18 months and at 4-6 years).

**Tdap** is for older children and adults. In North Carolina, Tdap is required for children entering 6th grade. Older teens and adults through 64 years of age should receive one dose of Tdap. Adults 65 and older who have close contact with an infant and have not already had a Tdap vaccine should also get one dose.

◦ Review your family's immunization records to ensure all required or recommended vaccines were given. Older adults can also get a booster vaccine.

## PRACTICE GOOD HEALTH MANNERS

1. Stay home when sick
2. Cough and sneeze into your sleeve or cover your mouth and nose with a tissue.
3. Wash hands regularly (see below).

## HANDWASHING

Wash hands often, especially if you are sick. Washing hands is the best way to prevent the spread of many illnesses. No soap and water? Use a hand sanitizer made with alcohol (follow package directions) – then wash with soap and water as soon as you can.



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