

Fast Facts

- Of children under six months of age who contract pertussis, 72% must be hospitalized, with 84% of all deaths from pertussis occurring among children in this age group.
- Complications from pertussis can include pneumonia, ear infection, seizures, brain disorders or death.
- In recent years, 15 to 21 infant deaths from pertussis have been reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) annually. A growing number of cases of pertussis have been reported to the CDC since the 1980s, mostly among adolescents ages 10 to 19 years and infants younger than five months.
- A child who gets sick with diphtheria in the United States today has a one in 10 chance of dying.
- Before the introduction of the vaccine in the 1940s, pertussis was a major cause of serious illness and death among infants and young children in the United States.



RESOURCES

The CDC has trained operators available 24 hours a day at (800) 232-4636 (CDC-INFO) to answer specific individual questions about vaccines and vaccine-preventable diseases.

- CDC's National Immunization Program:
www.cdc.gov/vaccines
- National Network for Immunization Information:
www.immunizationinfo.org
- American Academy of Pediatrics:
www.cispimmunize.org

REFERENCES

"Pertussis Disease Q&A," National Immunization Program (NIP), Centers for Disease Control (CDC),
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/dis-faqs.htm

"Parents' Guide to Immunization," National Immunization Program (NIP), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2005,
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/parents-guide/default.htm#pguide

"Adult Immunization Schedule," National Immunization Program (NIP) website, Centers for Disease Control (CDC),
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/schedules/adult-schedule.htm



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Fast Facts *for families*



Pertussis: A Family Affair

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A new baby is the center of attention in any household. But along with sharing their affection, family and friends often unknowingly share germs with little ones. Pertussis is one of the vaccine-preventable diseases that can cause infants and young children to become seriously ill, so it's important to make immunization a family affair! When older children, adolescents and adults are up-to-date on their pertussis immunizations, baby is protected, too.

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, also known as “whooping cough,” is caused by bacteria that infect the respiratory system. The most common symptom is attacks of rapid coughing that may sound like “whooping.” Pertussis is highly contagious and is spread through close contact with an infected person who is coughing or sneezing. Pertussis can cause pneumonia, seizures and even death, especially among infants under the age of 12 months, who are the most likely to be hospitalized as a result of the disease.

Can we prevent pertussis in infants and children?

The vaccine called DTaP (diphtheria/tetanus/acellular pertussis) is the best way to protect infants and young children from pertussis. The vaccine should be given starting at two months of age, following up with recommended doses at four and six months of age. Additional doses of DTaP are recommended at 15 to 18 months of age and at four to six years of age. Infants must receive all doses of the vaccine to get full protection against pertussis, so parents are urged to start and complete the series of doses on time.



Do adolescents and adults need pertussis immunization?

Yes! Adolescents 11-18 years of age should receive the one-dose booster known as Tdap (tetanus/diphtheria/acellular pertussis), since the effectiveness of the childhood vaccine fades over time. Adults should also receive the Tdap booster if they have not been immunized against pertussis within the past 10 years. It's crucial that all adolescents and adults – especially childcare workers and family members in households with young children - stay up-to-date on their immunizations for the health of the whole family.

Why are unvaccinated adolescents and adults a threat to the health of children?

Vaccine-preventable illnesses can cause serious and even life-threatening health problems for infants and children. Some of these illnesses are still fairly common - such as pertussis and chickenpox. Adults who are not immunized can get these illnesses and spread them to children. In addition, some children are not current on their immunizations, some can't get certain vaccines for medical reasons and some children's bodies are not able to respond to certain vaccines. For these children, the immunization of people around them is their only protection from disease.

Aren't adults who were immunized during childhood already protected?

While some adults assume that the vaccines they received as children will protect them for the rest of their lives, the reality is that the protection provided by some vaccines fades over time. This is why adults need “boosters” to boost their protection against some illnesses, including pertussis. In addition, some adults were never vaccinated as children or do not have full documentation of immunizations they may have received, and newer vaccines were not available at all when some adults were young.

What else can we do to protect young children from pertussis?

In addition to immunization, parents can also protect infants and children with frequent hand-washing and minimizing close contact with anyone who is coughing or has other cold symptoms. Parents should always make it a point to ask their babysitters if they are current on their immunizations.

What if I don't have health insurance, or can't afford immunizations?

There are programs that provide free or low-cost immunizations to people of all ages. Get in touch with your state Health Department's Immunization Program for more information. Contact information for each state can be accessed online at www.immunize.org/states.

