

Pertussis

What teachers need to know

What is Pertussis?

Pertussis, also known as “whooping cough,” is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*. These bacteria attach to and damage cells lining the upper respiratory system. Pertussis is best known for the characteristic “whooping” sound heard in some children as they breathe in through a still partially closed airway.

Symptoms of Pertussis

Initially, pertussis symptoms resemble a common cold with runny nose and sore throat. After 1-2 weeks, infected persons develop a persistent, violent cough that may last for weeks to months. This cough can result in post-cough vomiting, bursting of blood vessels in the eye, and rib fracture.

Over half of children under 1 year of age who get pertussis must be hospitalized. Infants with pertussis have severe cough with choking and may develop pneumonia, air leaks in the lung, seizures, and bleeding in the eyes and brain. **Pertussis in infants and young children may be fatal**, particularly in those unvaccinated.

How Pertussis is spread

Pertussis usually spreads when an infected person coughs or sneezes in close proximity to others, who then breathe in the bacteria. Many infants, who are too young to be vaccinated, are infected by family or caregivers who may not know they have the disease.

Treatment

Unlike a cold, cough medicines do not work against pertussis and should not be used unless directed by your doctor. Early treatment with antibiotics can make the disease less severe. If you suspect you have pertussis, make an appointment with your healthcare provider. At home, practice good hand hygiene, keep **hydrated with plenty of fluids**, and eat small meals frequently throughout the day to help prevent vomiting. A cool mist vaporizer may help soothe your cough.

The Vaccine Booster: Tdap

Protection against pertussis fades over time. Tdap is a booster shot that protects against three diseases: tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis. Adults in close contact with children and infants are recommended to receive one dose of Tdap. The 10 year Td (tetanus booster) can be replaced with Tdap and may be given before the 10 year mark.

Prevention Tips

Get a booster shot	Pertussis can be deadly to infants and young children. Caregivers and adolescent siblings of young children should get a dose of Tdap booster vaccine.
Stay at home if ill	All persons should stay home from school until they have completed their 5 day antibiotic regimen or lab tests have ruled out pertussis.
Wash your hands often	Hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of infection. Encourage your students to cleanse their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand gel often, particularly after coughing, sneezing, playing, and before handling food.

