



# Pertussis

## Causes

Pertussis, a respiratory illness commonly known as whooping cough, is a very contagious disease caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. These bacteria attach to the cilia (tiny, hair-like extensions) that line part of the upper respiratory system. The bacteria release toxins, which damage the cilia and cause inflammation (swelling).

## Transmission

Pertussis is a very contagious disease only found in humans and is spread from person to person. People with pertussis usually spread the disease by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the pertussis bacteria. Symptoms of pertussis usually develop within 7–10 days after being exposed, but sometimes not for as long as 6 weeks.

## Vaccination

There are several formulations of vaccines used to prevent diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis. Some are combined with vaccines to prevent other diseases and reduce the total number of shots that someone receives at one office visit. In the U.S., DTaP, Tdap, and Td vaccines are most commonly used. One of these (DTaP) is given to children younger than 7 years of age, and two (Tdap and Td) are given to older children and adults.

## **Children**

Children should get 5 doses of DTaP, one dose at each of the following ages: 2, 4, 6, and 15-18 months and 4-6 years.

For more information visit:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/index.html>



## **Adults**

*Why vaccinate adults against whooping cough?*

- Adults are the most common source of pertussis infection in infants.
- Infants are at the greatest risk of serious complications, including death, from pertussis. In 2010 alone, 25 US infants died from pertussis.
- CDC estimates that there are between one and three million pertussis cases in the US annually.
- In adults, whooping cough can cause coughing spells that can affect breathing, eating, and sleeping. It can lead to cracked ribs and hospitalization.
- Pregnant women especially need to be immunized. They should get the vaccine late in the second trimester or in the third trimester of each pregnancy.

*Which adults need whooping cough vaccine? All adults age 19 to 64 years need a one-time whooping cough booster vaccine.*

- Adults age 65 and older need a one-time whooping cough booster if they will have close contact with infants younger than 12 months.
- If not already vaccinated, pregnant women should receive the booster vaccine late in the second trimester or during the third trimester of each pregnancy.
- The whooping cough booster is a combination vaccine with tetanus and diphtheria. The vaccine is called Tdap.
- Once an adult gets the Tdap vaccine, he or she should get the Td (tetanus and diphtheria) booster every 10 years from then on.

*Why is the whooping cough vaccine important?*

- Vaccination can protect you from an illness that can cause serious discomfort and lost work time.
- Pertussis vaccination can help keep you from making others, including infants, sick.