

# Pertussis (Whooping Cough) - What You Need to Know

## What is pertussis?

- Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a serious highly infectious disease that impacts breathing. It is caused by Bordetella pertussis bacteria and is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes.
- Outbreaks of pertussis can occur in school or child care settings and areas with many unvaccinated people.
- Pertussis may start out as a simple cold, but it progresses to cause uncontrollable coughing spells.
- Pertussis is marked by the “whoop” sound that is made following coughing when an infected person inhales.
- Symptoms appear 7 - 14 days after infection and can last 6 - 10 weeks.
- Pertussis is endemic in the United States. This means that it regularly occurs or is common.

## How can we prevent pertussis?

While pertussis is treated with antibiotics, there are two vaccines to prevent it.

**The DTaP and Tdap vaccines protect against diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis.**

### Infants and Children

Infants and children should get one dose of the DTaP vaccine at the following ages:

- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- 15 -18 months
- 4 - 6 years

### Adolescents

Adolescents should receive one dose of the Tdap vaccine at age 11 or 12.

*In Colorado, the final dose of the DTaP vaccine is required before entry to kindergarten, and the Tdap vaccine is required before entry to 6th grade.*

### Pregnant people

Pregnant people should receive one dose of the Tdap vaccine with each pregnancy at 27 - 36 weeks.

### Adults

Adults who have never received a dose of Tdap should get one. Adults should then get a booster dose of Tdap every 10 years.

*While everyone should be vaccinated for pertussis, some, like those who've had allergic reactions to previous pertussis vaccines or who have certain health conditions, may not be able to be vaccinated.*

*Parents should ensure everyone who's around their infant is up to date with pertussis vaccinations and boosters. This helps protect newborns while they are too young to get pertussis vaccines.*

No vaccine is 100% effective. You can still get pertussis even if you've been vaccinated. However, vaccinated people usually have much milder infections than unvaccinated people.



**Flip over to read about the risks of pertussis infection.**



## What are the risks of pertussis?

Pertussis can affect people of all ages, but **it can be deadly for infants and young children**. Some infants who get pertussis will not cough at all. Instead they will stop breathing and turn blue. One third of babies who get pertussis will be hospitalized. Of those:

- 2 in 3 will get apnea (dangerous pauses in breathing)
- 1 in 5 will contract pneumonia (infection of the lungs)
- 1 in 50 will get convulsions (violent shaking)
- 1 in 150 will have encephalopathy (a brain disease)
- 1 in 100 will die.

While complications in other populations are less severe, coughs from pertussis infection can cause adolescents and adults to vomit, lose control of their bladder, faint, or fracture ribs.

*Have questions about pertussis or DTaP and Tdap vaccines? Talk with your healthcare provider, pharmacist, or community health center.*

**Routine vaccines like DTaP and Tdap are essential in keeping our communities safe and preventing the spread of dangerous diseases like pertussis (whooping cough).**

**Find free and low-cost vaccine providers near you:  
<https://cdphe.colorado.gov/find-free-low-cost-vaccine-provider>**

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### Sources

- <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/causes-transmission.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/complications.html>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pregnant/mom/get-vaccinated.html>
- [https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/outbreaks.html#:~:text=Whooping%20cough%20\(pertussis\)%20is%20an,easily%20from%20person%20to%20person](https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/outbreaks.html#:~:text=Whooping%20cough%20(pertussis)%20is%20an,easily%20from%20person%20to%20person)