



**PUBLIC HEALTH
SERVICES DISTRICT
COCONINO COUNTY**

PERTUSSIS (Whooping Cough)

What is pertussis (whooping cough)?

Pertussis is a contagious, bacterial respiratory disease. Although pertussis may be a mild disease in older children and adults, in younger children this disease can be complicated by pneumonia and occasionally inflammation of the brain. In rare cases, pertussis can cause death (especially in children less than one year of age).

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

The symptoms of pertussis usually occur in stages. The first stage usually begins like a cold, with a runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever and cough. The cough lasts one to two weeks and then becomes worse. The second stage of pertussis includes uncontrolled coughing spells followed by a whooping noise when a person breathes in. During these severe coughing spells, a person may vomit, or their lips or face may look blue from a lack of oxygen. Between coughing spells, a person may appear well. This stage may last four to six weeks. Very young infants (less than six months of age), adolescents and adults may not have these symptoms. Pertussis in these groups may seem more like a cold with a cough that may last a long time.

Who gets pertussis?

Pertussis can occur at any age, but is most common in children in the first year of life. Infants and young children usually get the disease from an older brother or sister or an adult who may have a mild illness.

How is pertussis spread?

The bacteria which cause pertussis are found in the mouths, noses, and throats of infected people. The bacteria are spread in the air by droplets produced during sneezing or coughing. Once a person is exposed by inhaling these droplets, it can take from seven to twenty days before the first symptoms appear.

How long can a person spread pertussis?

Pertussis is very contagious during the early stage of the illness and becomes less contagious by the end of three weeks. Antibiotics will shorten the contagious period of the illness.

How is pertussis diagnosed?

A health provider may suspect pertussis when someone has the symptoms described above. A sample of mucus from the back of the nose must be taken during the early stage of the illness in order to grow the bacteria. Laboratory tests can be done on

the sample to identify the bacteria. The Coconino County Department of Health can culture, at no charge, any individuals with symptoms. People being cultured at the health department are still advised to see their health provider for an evaluation.

How is pertussis treated?

Infants younger than six months of age and persons with severe cases often require hospitalization. Severe cases may require oxygen and mild sedation to help control coughing spells. Antibiotics may make the illness less severe if started in the early stage of the disease. Generally, if a person is exposed to pertussis, specific antibiotics may help prevent the disease.

How can pertussis be prevented?

Pertussis can be prevented by giving a series of shots to children in early infancy. Pertussis vaccine is given at two, four, six, and 15 months of age, and again when a child enters school. At least 3-4 doses are necessary to protect a child from pertussis. Prompt use of antibiotics in a household is helpful in limiting other cases.

Where can I get further information?

- Your Health Provider
- The Coconino County Public Health Services District at:
928. 679.7222
2625 N. King St.
Flagstaff, Arizona 86004