

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Illnesses requiring droplet precautions

This handout describes pertussis (whooping cough). It explains how the disease can be spread and offers steps to keep others from getting it.

What is pertussis?

Pertussis is an illness caused by a bacterium called *Bordetella pertussis*. The illness is also called whooping cough.

Pertussis spreads between people very easily. Up to 90% of people (90 out of 100 people) who are exposed to the bacteria develop the disease. Adults and teens are at risk because their childhood immunization may no longer protect them.

There is a vaccine to prevent pertussis that lasts for many weeks. Certain vaccines are given to older people to protect them from the disease.

Pertussis is a *reportable* disease. This means that your doctor must tell the health department when someone is diagnosed with pertussis. This is because pertussis poses a *community health risk*. Anyone who has been exposed should be given antibiotics to protect themselves and others.



A vaccine to prevent pertussis lasts for many weeks.

What are the symptoms?

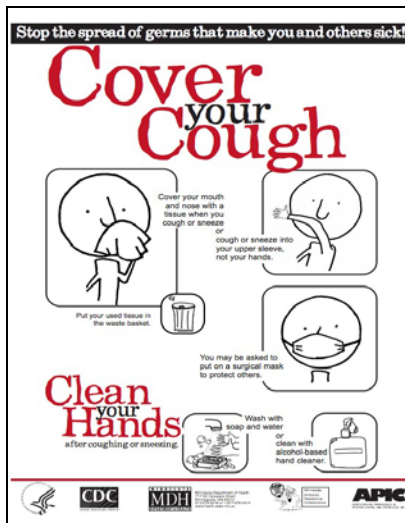
In children, symptoms are usually:

- Spasms of severe coughing with deep, noisy sounds when they breathe in
- Vomiting

In adults, the symptoms are usually less severe.

What are the risks of having pertussis?

When someone has pertussis, they are also at risk for *hypoxia* (not enough oxygen reaches the body's tissues), *apnea*, *pneumonia*, seizures, *encephalopathy* (diseases of the brain), and malnutrition. These problems are most common among infants and young children.



How is pertussis spread?

The disease is spread when someone who is infected coughs or sneezes, and another person has direct contact with droplets that contain the bacteria.

If you have pertussis, please practice “respiratory hygiene.” Wear a mask, wash your hands often, and dispose of tissues in wastebaskets when coming into a healthcare facility.

Pick up a free “Cover Your Cough Kit” at the Information Desk in the main lobby of the hospital, or at your clinic.

How is pertussis diagnosed?

Most times, your healthcare provider can diagnose pertussis by your symptoms. They may also take a swab of your nose or throat and send it to the lab to be tested.

How are others protected from pertussis?

At UW Medical Center, we place a “Droplet Precautions” sign near the door of your room. This tells healthcare workers and your visitors to follow certain precautions when caring for you.

If you are in droplet precautions:

- Hospital staff will wear masks, gowns, and gloves when providing care.
- Visitors who have not been vaccinated should not visit you.
- **We advise hand washing for 15 seconds, using alcohol hand gels, and environmental cleanliness.**
- We will ask you to stay in your room unless you need to go to other areas of the hospital for treatment. If you leave your room, we will ask you to wash your hands and wear a yellow gown, gloves, and a mask.
- Please do **not** use the nutrition rooms. When you want a snack or ice water, ask a member of your care team to bring it to you.

When can droplet precautions be stopped?

Droplet precautions for pertussis may be stopped 24 hours after you have finished your course of antibiotics.



To Learn More

To learn more about pertussis, visit www.cdc.gov/pertussis.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Infection Prevention:
206.598.6122