

Parents Can Protect Their Babies from Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Keep your child and yourself safe. By getting all vaccines on time, you and your child can be protected from many vaccine preventable diseases over your lifetimes. Immunizations have saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other health measure.

What is pertussis?

- Pertussis (whooping cough) is a very serious bacterial disease that affects the lungs.
- The germs are spread easily by infected people when they cough, sneeze or have close contact with others.
- A person who has had pertussis **does not have** life-long protection. They can get pertussis again even if they received antibiotics.

What are signs and symptoms of pertussis?

- Early symptoms are sneezing, a runny nose, a fever and a cough.
- Over time, the cough gets worse, leading to severe coughing spells that sometimes end with a whooping sound as the person struggles to inhale. The cough can last 2 months or longer, and makes it very hard to breathe. This can affect the amount of oxygen that gets to the brain.
- Young babies may not have the same symptoms so parents and caregivers may not realize how sick their baby really is.

Babies are most at risk.

- All young children, especially babies, can quickly become very sick when they have pertussis.
- They have trouble breathing and can develop serious complications like pneumonia (infection of the lungs), convulsions (seizures) and permanent brain damage.
- Babies can die from pertussis, even if they are treated with antibiotics or hospitalized.

Protect yourself and your baby.

- Preventing pertussis in parents is an important way to protect their babies. A parent can spread germs to their baby before they start to show symptoms.
- The vaccine is safe to receive in pregnancy and when breastfeeding.

- Pregnant women are strongly recommended to get the pertussis vaccine in each pregnancy (typically between 27 to 32 weeks gestation), so that their baby is born with some protection.
- All parents, extended family members and caregivers are recommended to get a pertussis vaccine if they have never received one dose as an adult.
 - ❖ Although it is best if they are immunized before the baby's birth, the vaccine can be given afterwards.
- The vaccine is given as an injection in the upper arm. Common mild side effects last 1-2 days and include soreness, swelling or redness at the injection site. These side effects will not prevent you from caring for the baby.
- Contact the nearest Public Health office for information about getting the pertussis vaccine.

Get your baby immunized on time!

- It is very important that parents start their baby's immunizations at 2 months of age to protect them against serious diseases like pertussis.

Get medical attention immediately!

- If you or your baby is sick or you think that you or your baby has been exposed to someone who has pertussis, see a doctor or nurse practitioner as soon as possible.
- Early diagnosis and treatment with antibiotics may make the disease milder and reduce the risks of any complications.
- For more information contact your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner or HealthLine at 811.

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