

# The Delaware General Health District

*Essential public health services keeping us safe and well.*

## The Facts on Pertussis

### **What is pertussis?**

Pertussis, also known as “whooping cough,” is a cough illness that is caused by bacteria. It begins like a common cold with runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever, and a mild cough for 1 - 2 weeks. The cough will then worsen over the next few weeks and may last for several weeks. The cough at this stage occurs more frequently at night, and may involve gagging or vomiting at the end of a coughing spell. Persons of any age can get pertussis.

### **How is pertussis spread?**

Pertussis is spread when a person with the disease coughs or sneezes, sending germs into the air. People who come in contact with or breathe in these germs may become infected. The time it takes for the disease to develop after exposure is usually 5 to 10 days but can be as long as 21 days. Persons with pertussis are most contagious during the early stage of the illness, however, the ability to pass the disease to others can last for weeks. Even though your child and adult family members have received all of their required immunizations, they are still at risk for this disease since vaccine effectiveness may wane over time. If you or your child is currently experiencing these symptoms we recommend that you contact your physician to see if testing and/or medication is indicated.

### **What can be done to prevent pertussis spread?**

Parents should make sure that their children receive DTaP (diphtheria and tetanus toxoids and acellular pertussis) vaccine at 2, 4, and 6 months of age and then booster shots at 15 to 18 months of age and another at 4 to 6 years of age. A single Tdap booster is recommended for children and adults 11-64 years of age.

### **Who is at risk?**

The following are a few examples of those at risk for pertussis:

- ! Household members of a pertussis case
- ! Daycare contacts of a pertussis case including teachers and children in the same classroom
- ! Persons having direct contact with or spending 3 hours with a case

These close contacts may need to take antibiotics to prevent the illness from developing. Talk to your physician if you have been in close contact with a pertussis case.

It is extremely important that individuals with pertussis stay home from school, work, sports, or any other activities where they could expose others, until they have taken at least 5 full days of appropriate antibiotics (**all antibiotics should be taken to completion**). Azithromycin is the drug of choice to prevent and treat this disease.

### **What if I have additional questions?**

Nurses at the Delaware General Health District are available to answer questions regarding pertussis. Please call 740-203-2040.



**Delaware General  
Health District**  
*Dedicated to your health.*

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The Delaware General Health District operates in accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.