

PERTUSSIS

Pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, is a contagious disease caused by bacteria. Symptoms usually begin 7-10 days following exposure. The first symptoms of pertussis are those of the common cold with a mild cough. After a week or two, the cough becomes more severe and may occur more frequently during sleep. As the cough gets worse, it usually includes a series of coughs (coughing fits or spasms). People with pertussis often have vomiting following the coughing spell and have difficulty catching their breath, which may cause a whooping sound. However, adolescents, adults, and very young infants may not develop the whoop. Generally, there is no fever, or only a low grade fever with pertussis.

Pertussis is spread by contact with nose or throat secretions from an infected person. This can happen when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Without treatment an infected person can spread the disease for up to 3 weeks from the time the cough begins. However, after 5 days of antibiotic treatment the person is not contagious.

It is important that you not send your child to school if he or she has any of the signs and symptoms of pertussis. Anyone with symptoms needs to be seen by their physician. Children with these symptoms at school will be isolated and parents will be called to pick them up.

Complete pertussis immunization normally prevents this disease. It is recommended you check the immunization status of all family members and make sure they are up-to-date for DTaP (a pertussis booster vaccine for persons less than 7 years of age) or Tdap (a booster vaccine for persons 10-64 years of age). Your healthcare provider or the Scott County Health Department (752-8455) should be able to assist you in determining if vaccination is needed for any family member.