

## **MANAGING YOUR PERTUSSIS**

### **What Is Pertussis?**

Pertussis is also called whooping cough because the cough can sound like a whoop or bark.

People of any age can get pertussis but it most often infects children younger than 2. It can be very serious in babies younger than 1 year old.

People with pertussis can cough for a long time, to the point of getting exhausted. The infection starts with flu-like symptoms that turn into a severe cough, which can last up to a few weeks.

### **What Causes Pertussis?**

Pertussis is caused by a bacteria named *Bordetella pertussis* and is highly contagious.

### **What Are the Symptoms of Pertussis?**

Symptoms first seem like those of a cold, with a mild cough, but then, in 1 week, the cough becomes a dry, severe whooping cough that lasts more than 2 weeks. Long coughing spells occur, and coughing bursts often happening at night, with an average of 15 spells in 24 hours.

The whoop isn't always heard. Most children don't have fever during the coughing. Other common symptoms include slight fever, flushing (red face), loss of appetite, feeling sick, pink eyes, runny nose, and sweating.

### **How Is Pertussis Diagnosed?**

The health care provider will ask about the medical history and do an examination, paying attention to the lungs, ears, nose, and throat. Blood tests can be used to diagnose pertussis. The

health care provider may use a swab on the throat and nose to take a sample and make sure that another infection isn't causing symptoms. Blood tests and chest x-ray may also be done.

### **How Is Pertussis Treated?**

Children and adults can usually be treated at home. The health care provider will prescribe antibiotics such as azithromycin. Warm fluids such as apple juice can help the cough. It's important to keep the nose and throat clear of thick mucus to make it easier to breathe. The health care provider can show you how to do this with salt water and a bulb syringe. Putting a humidifier in a bedroom can also help breathing.

Pertussis spreads easily, so people who have it should stay away from others. Frequent hand washing is important to avoid spreading the infection. Also, family members and other contacts will need treatment to protect them from infection.

### **DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Pertussis**

- ✓ **DO** make sure that you and your children get vaccinations for pertussis.
- ✓ **DO** make sure that you or your child drinks plenty of fluids.
- ✓ **DO** make sure that you or your child stays away from smells or smoke that can make the cough worse.
- ✓ **DO** use good hand-washing practices, especially after being with someone who's sick.

Hand washing is important to avoid spreading infection.

- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider right away or go to the emergency room if you or your child has breathing problems, stops breathing, or is breathing fast; cannot drink; has a high fever; has a seizure; has blue hands, face, or feet; or is very tired or sluggish.

⊗ **DON'T** stop taking medicine or change the dosage because you feel better unless the health care provider says to do so.

⊗ **DON'T** try to treat pertussis with cough or allergy medicines. These can at times make symptoms worse.

FROM THE DESK OF

NOTES

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Tel: (800) 311-3435; Website:  
<http://www.cdc.gov>

Copyright © 2021 by Elsevier, Inc.