



Whooping Cough

1 What is it?

Whooping cough is a bacterial infection that affects the airway and can cause severe coughing spells or difficulty breathing. Whooping cough can lead to pneumonia or even death. About 5 out of 100 adults who contract this infection are sick enough that they need to be hospitalized.

Newborns and young infants are particularly susceptible to whooping cough because the natural mechanisms to protect the body against foreign substances and disease are not fully matured. Any infection during the first few months of life is potentially serious because infants tend to have more severe reactions to illness and have a higher risk of death. Nearly half of the babies who catch whooping cough require hospitalization.

2 How is it spread?

Whooping cough is highly contagious and is spread from person to person through tiny droplets that enter the air from coughing or sneezing.

Infants are exposed to whooping cough from the adults and adolescents that live with them or take care of them. Adults and teens have fewer antibodies specific to this infection, tend to be less ill, may not have the characteristic coughing spells that are expected and therefore go longer without being diagnosed and treated appropriately.

4 out of 5 babies who get whooping cough catch it from someone at home

To prevent the spread of whooping cough and other common illnesses, avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth and always practice good hand washing.

3 How can I prevent whooping cough?

The best way to prevent getting the infection is to make sure you are up to date on your Tdap vaccine. (This includes parents, siblings, grandparents and caretakers of newborns.) The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that pregnant women get a Tdap during every pregnancy. Vaccination during the latter part of pregnancy allows antibodies to pass through the placenta to the baby. This is the only way to give your newborn some level of protection.

4 How can I tell if I have whooping cough?

Anyone who is ill should have limited or no contact with newborns and should take special precautions not to cough around young babies. If you wonder if you might have whooping cough, you should make an appointment to see your health care provider. Whooping cough should

be considered when a person complains of coughing spells, a cough lasts more than three weeks, or the cough is associated with shortness of breath, chest pain or difficulty breathing. Based on symptoms and risk factors, testing for the bacterium (*Bordetella pertussis*) that causes whooping cough may be done. To do this, a swab is used to gather some of the mucus from the back of the nose (nasopharynx region where nasal passages meet the back of the throat.)

5 How is whooping cough treated?

Treatment usually consists of antibiotics and other therapies and/or medications (including oxygen) to help support the individual. If a person stops breathing, turns blue or becomes unresponsive, call 911.

To find out more and view the prevalence of whooping cough in our area, visit <http://health.utah.gov/epi/diseases/pertussis/>

PAYSON

15 S 1000 E Suite 125
Payson, Utah 84651
Phone : 801-465-2559

SPANISH FORK

325 W Center
Spanish Fork, Utah 84660
Phone : 801-465-2559

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