



Pertussis, what is it?

What is it? – pertussis (whooping cough) is a highly contagious disease marked by severe coughing. It is named after the “whoop” sound people make when they try to breathe in during a severe coughing spell.

What are the symptoms? Early symptoms include runny nose, sneezing, fever and a mild cough. These symptoms often last up to two weeks followed by increasingly severe coughing spell (whoops!)

During a classic coughing episode:

- * “Whoop” sound is heard as person tries to breathe during spell
- * Coughs usually produce thick mucus
- * Vomiting may occur
- * Lips and nails turn blue due to lack of oxygen
- * Patient is exhausted after coughing spell

Who is likely to get Pertussis? - Milder symptoms usually affect all age groups; however they are increasing among school age children. Recent outbreaks have shown older children get a milder form which is hard to recognize. They then pass the disease to un-vaccinated younger children and infants.

How is it spread? – Since Pertussis is caused by a bacteria found in the mouth, nose and throat, it is spread by close contact when the person speaks, coughs or sneezes. Hand washing is helpful after coughing or sneezing due to the ease by which pertussis is spread.

How long does it last? – Symptoms appear between 6 to 21 days after exposure to the disease.

How is it prevented? – First, the age old advice of covering ones mouth when sneezing or coughing goes a long way in prevention. Additionally, while there is no life-long protection against pertussis, immunization is the best protection for your children. The vaccination to protect your child against pertussis is the DTaP. Children receive 5 doses of this vaccine between the ages of 2 months and 6 years. It is important that they receive all 5 doses for maximum protection.

How is it treated? – Pertussis is treatable with antibiotics. Patients are advised to take all prescribed medication and to avoid contact with anyone, especially small children and infants. Health Department personnel are required to follow-up with family and contacts of persons testing positive for pertussis, to determine if preventative treatment is necessary.

For more information about pertussis and other childhood diseases and immunizations, visit our website at www.bhsj.org, or call our offices at the numbers listed below.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

Coldwater
517-279-9561 x 132

Hillsdale
517-437-7395 x 121

Three Rivers
269-273-2161 x 207