

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) FAQs

Frequently Asked Questions

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If you have been around someone who has pertussis (whooping cough), you may have some questions. More information is available on our website: www.allencountyhealthdepartment.org

Who is considered a close contact and should be treated?

A close contact is anyone who has had face-to-face contact or shared a confined space for a prolonged period of time with someone who has been diagnosed with pertussis. Close contacts can also include persons who have direct contact with respiratory, oral or nasal secretions from someone who has been diagnosed with pertussis – for example through coughing, sneezing, and sharing food and eating utensils.

How do you treat pertussis?

Antibiotics can make the disease milder if they are started early enough and will help to prevent spreading the illness to others.

If I or my child is up-to-date on vaccinations, is an antibiotic necessary?

Yes. The Ohio Department of Health recommends anyone who is a close contact of someone with pertussis should take antibiotics as a precaution, regardless of their vaccination status. It is important to remember that while vaccination is the best way to protect people from getting a disease, no vaccine is 100% effective. We also know that the protection gets weaker as we grow – that's why getting booster shots on time is important.

What about the other people in my house, or other children? Who should take the antibiotics?

Only the person(s) in your household that have been identified as a close contact should be taking antibiotics. Watch your other children and family members. Check with your doctor if anyone else in your household develops symptoms. Early symptoms are similar to the common cold – mild cough, runny nose, sneezing, and mild fever. Be sure to tell the doctor that they may have been exposed to someone with pertussis.

What about school and work? When should I stay home?

If you or a family member develops symptoms, stay home from work or school until you have had a chance to check with your doctor. If you are taking antibiotics because you are a contact, you may go to work or school unless you start developing symptoms. If you have been diagnosed with pertussis, and are taking antibiotics, you may return to work or school after you have finished 5 days of antibiotics.

How can we prevent the spread of pertussis?

- **Stay home if you are sick.**
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.

See also – [Pertussis Fact Sheet](#).