

Health Information

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

The County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency has provided the following information about pertussis (whooping cough). The entire state of California is currently experiencing an epidemic of whooping cough cases which is the common name for pertussis.

Pertussis is spread through the air when an ill person coughs or sneezes. Infants and young children are at highest risk of life threatening complications from the disease. Their symptoms most often include cold symptoms such as runny nose, slight fever, and occasional cough. The cough becomes worse, turning into coughing spasms that may be followed by:

- a crowing(whooping) sound on breathing in
- vomiting or gagging
- choking or turning blue

In older children and adults, pertussis symptoms include aggravating coughing attacks that last for two weeks or longer and may be accompanied by vomiting, gagging, and sticky mucus production. These attacks may worsen at night. Between the coughing attacks, the person may feel well and have no symptoms.

If your child starts to show symptoms of pertussis:

1. Consult your healthcare provider and let them know your child may have been exposed to someone ill with pertussis. This disease is treated with specific antibiotics.
2. Notify the school if your doctor suspects your child is ill with pertussis. Ill children should stay home until completion of five days of antibiotic therapy to prevent spreading the disease to others.

To help protect against getting ill from pertussis:

1. Check with your doctor to see if you and your family are up-to-date with the appropriate number of DTaP (childhood) or Tdap (adolescent and adult) vaccine doses.
2. Wash hands frequently.
3. Visit the websites www.vaccineinformation.org/video/pertussis.asp or www.sdiz.org to learn more about pertussis.
4. Parents of children without symptoms, especially those children who have not been vaccinated against pertussis, may consider making an appointment for the child to see their doctor to receive post-exposure prophylaxis (medicine given after contact with a person with pertussis in order to prevent the disease).

If you have any additional questions regarding pertussis, you may call the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, Epidemiology and Immunization Services at 1-866-358-2966 and press 5 to speak with a Public Health Nurse.