WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW: Whooping Cough

What is it?¹

• Whooping cough, or pertussis, is a potentially serious, highly contagious respiratory disease that can last up to 12 weeks
• Whooping cough is a disease caused by a bacteria

How is it spread?¹

• It is spread from person to person, usually by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others
• Persons, including adults, may not realize they’re infected, and can transmit the disease to other susceptible people, including unimmunized or incompletely immunized infants

What are the symptoms?¹

The clinical course of whooping cough is divided into three stages. At first, symptoms resemble the common cold. Over time, the cough increases in severity.

First Stage (1-2 weeks):
• runny nose
• low-grade fever
• mild, occasional cough

Second Stage (1-6 weeks):
• fits of many rapid coughs followed by a long intake of breath often accompanied by a high-pitched “whoop”
• vomiting during or after coughing fits
• exhaustion after coughing fits

Third Stage (weeks to months):
• gradual recovery often marked by reoccurring coughing fits with subsequent respiratory infections

Infants and whooping cough:

• According to a recent study, approximately 85% of infants with whooping cough got it from a member of their immediate or extended family, when a source of the infection could be identified²
• Infants under 6 months old may not have the strength to make the whoop sound, but they still have coughing fits¹
• In the first 6 months of life, infants are at high risk for complications from whooping cough because their immune systems are still developing³
• Complications in infants can include hospitalization, pneumonia, seizures, brain disorders, and, in very rare cases, death¹

Be Sure to Get Vaccinated! For persons 10 years of age and older, Tdap vaccination is the best preventive measure against whooping cough, but vaccination rates remain low. According to a recent National Health Interview Survey, only 20.1% of adults remember receiving the Tdap vaccine.⁴⁺ Remind your patients to get vaccinated to help protect themselves against whooping cough.


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