## Pertussis FAQ - General Questions

### Is whooping cough the same thing as pertussis?

* Yes, whooping cough is the common term for pertussis.
* Pertussis is often called whooping cough because one of the symptoms is a severe cough that can have a “whoop” sound at the end. This sound is caused by someone trying to catch their breath.

### How serious is pertussis?

* Pertussis is very serious, especially for babies and young kids.
* Pertussis can cause pneumonia, seizures, brain damage, and death.
* Babies younger than one year of age who get pertussis may be hospitalized or even die.

### How long is someone with pertussis contagious for?

* A person is contagious for 21 days after their cough begins or until they complete five days of antibiotics.

### Can I spread pertussis even if I do not have a bad cough?

* Yes, you can have pertussis without realizing it and infect others. This is especially important to know for people who are going to be around babies or pregnant women.

### I am excluded for pertussis. What does this mean?

* This means that a child or adult with pertussis should not return to school, daycare, or other activities. This is because they can spread pertussis to others and should not participate in normal activities.
* Exclusions include daycare, school, college, sports, social activities, and work.

### If someone has pertussis, what are the exclusion recommendations for daycares, summer camps, schools, and workers in Maine?

* If an individual with pertussis is within 21 days after their symptoms began, they should be excluded until five days of antibiotics are complete.
* If an individual with pertussis is untreated, they should be excluded for 21 days after their symptoms began.
* Employees should talk with their employer to understand their specific company policies.

### I spent time with someone that has pertussis. Is there a way to prevent getting sick?

* Preventative antibiotics (often called post exposure prophylaxis) can be taken to reduce your chances of getting pertussis. Generally, only close contacts of individuals with pertussis are recommended to receive preventative antibiotics.
* Close contacts usually include:
  + People who live with someone with pertussis
  + Any contacts who are considered high-risk which include:
    - Pregnant women in their third trimester
    - Infants (<12 months old)
  + All people who work with high risk populations
  + Someone that spent overnights with an individual with pertussis

### What is the treatment for pertussis?

* A five-day course of azithromycin.
* Alternative treatments include:
  + Clarithromycin
  + Erythromycin
  + Trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole
* It is important to start treatment as soon as possible, especially in infants. Treatment is not effective if started late in the course of illness.
* For more specific treatment guidelines, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/clinical/treatment.html>.

### Why was my child treated for pertussis before receiving test results?

* Treating before getting test results is recommended when the signs and symptoms strongly suggest pertussis or the patient is at high risk of severe disease or complications (ex: infants).
* Early treatment for pertussis is very important. Symptoms may be lessened if the patient starts treatment during the first or second week before coughing paroxysms (violent coughing) occur.

### Can someone get pertussis twice?

* Adults and teens can become infected with pertussis multiple times, even if they received the vaccination. This is because immunity from both the vaccination and natural immunity decrease over time. Also, everyone’s immune system is different.

### Are there special cleaning requirements for pertussis?

* No. Pertussis spreads by breathing in the bacteria that causes pertussis. This is from face-to-face contact with people who have pertussis. Most people do not get pertussis from contaminated surfaces or objects.
* Routine cleaning and disinfecting will remove these bacteria.

### Why do I need to wear a mask to visit someone at the hospital with pertussis?

* Pertussis is highly contagious and wearing a mask helps protect you from getting pertussis.

### Is there a lab test for pertussis?

* Yes. A nasal swab is done to test for pertussis.

### How often should adults get the pertussis vaccine?

* All adults should get one dose of the Tdap vaccine.
* Pregnant women should get vaccinated during each pregnancy. Please see the Pertussis Frequently Asked Questions for Pregnant Women and New Parents.

### If my child had pertussis, should he or she still get vaccinated?

* Yes. When someone gets pertussis, their body develops a natural immunity. However, it is unknown how long that immunity lasts for each person, so routine vaccination against pertussis is still recommended for people who have had pertussis.

### What is the best prevention for people who are up to date on their pertussis vaccine?

* Prevention methods include:
  + Wash your hands
  + Stay home when you are sick
  + Cover your cough with a tissue or sleeve
  + Avoid close contact with anyone who has a cough or cold symptoms.
  + Ensure family members are up to date on pertussis vaccines