

silence the sounds of
PERTUSSIS

Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases





SOUNDS OF PERTUSSIS

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a potentially deadly infection that can strike at any age, but is particularly dangerous for babies.

The sounds of pertussis are like no other, marked by a “whoop” made when gasping for breath after a severe coughing attack.

THE REALITY

Pertussis can be a serious illness, particularly for babies and young children.

- More than half of babies with pertussis must be hospitalized.
- Coughing can be so severe that it is hard for babies to eat, drink or breathe.
- Babies may bleed behind the eyes and in the brain from coughing.
- About 1 child in 10 with pertussis also gets pneumonia, and about 1 in every 50 will have convulsions.
- Brain damage occurs in 1 out of every 250 people who get pertussis.
- Pertussis causes about 10-15 deaths a year in the United States.

BABIES ARE MOST VULNERABLE

Babies are at the highest risk for developing complications from pertussis and dying. Ninety percent of pertussis-associated deaths have been among babies less than six months of age.



Parents are responsible for more than half of whooping cough cases in babies. It is easily spread because it is most contagious during the first few weeks of infection when symptoms resemble a cold. A parent, grandparent or babysitter suffering from what seems like a cold can actually have pertussis and spread the disease to the baby.

Parents, caregivers and other family members should be vaccinated to help “cocoon” babies and young children when they are most vulnerable to the dangers of pertussis.

The Way it Was

- Pertussis was first described in the 16th century.
- The bacteria causing pertussis was first isolated in 1906.
- Well into the 20th century, pertussis was one of the most common and dangerous childhood diseases.
- Before pertussis vaccine was available in the 1940s, more than 200,000 cases were reported each year.

ADULTS IMMUNIZE FOR CHILDREN

The best way to protect babies from pertussis is to make sure that anyone in close contact with them is vaccinated. Babies are





most vulnerable before they can have their first vaccine against pertussis at two months of age.

Babies under 12 months are still very much at risk, and children are not fully protected until they have received the complete course of vaccination by age seven.

The CDC recommends a single pertussis booster for any adult aged 19 to 64 who is in close contact with a baby, particularly parents, grandparents and babysitters.

The CDC also recommends the Tdap booster vaccine to protect adolescents between the ages of 11 and 18.

IMMUNIZE CHILDREN

During a pertussis outbreak, children who have received all their pertussis vaccinations are six times less likely to become infected than those who have never been vaccinated.

- Children need five doses of the DTaP vaccine by age seven. Babies are vulnerable to infection until fully vaccinated.
- Most children vaccinated with DTaP will be protected throughout childhood.

RECOGNIZING PERTUSSIS

People of any age can be infected with pertussis if they are



not vaccinated. In fact, in 2005, two-thirds of pertussis cases were among adolescents and adults.

Pertussis is caused by a bacterium called *Bordetella pertussis*, found in the mouth, nose and throat. It is spread through droplets from the mouth and nose when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks.

Classic pertussis usually starts with cold symptoms (runny nose, sneezing, mild fever and cough). After about two weeks, the coughing becomes more and more severe. This stage can last for weeks and even months. It's aptly nicknamed the 100-day cough.

Common signs of whooping cough:

- severe coughing that sounds like a "whoop" as the patient gasps for breath
- a cough that brings up a thick mucus
- patients turns blue from lack of oxygen

Patients may have 15-24 coughing attacks a day. After an episode, the patient often vomits and feels very tired. Between episodes, there may be no signs of illness.

ON THE RISE

Pertussis is the only infectious disease for which children are routinely immunized that is on the rise. After immunization was introduced in the 1940s, the number





of pertussis cases dropped by almost 100 percent. Often misdiagnosed as a cold, pertussis may be vastly underreported. In 2004, more than 25,000 cases were reported, but the number of annual cases may be much higher.

Many factors account for the rise:

- Not all babies are getting the vaccinations they need.
- Protection against whooping cough from early childhood vaccination decreases over time, and teens and adults can become infected repeatedly.
- Pertussis rates among adults have gone up 400% since 1990.
- Children, teens and adults with undiagnosed pertussis can spread the disease to others. In fact, 90% of unvaccinated children living with someone who has pertussis will get the disease.

AVOID CONTACT WITH OTHERS

The CDC recommends that:

- People with pertussis stay home and avoid contact with others until finishing treatment.
- Anyone exposed to pertussis be treated with an antibiotic to prevent infection.

Pertussis is a year-round disease that peaks in fall and winter during cold and flu season.



How Vaccines Work

- To protect against pertussis, the Tdap vaccine contains weakened or killed versions of the bacterium called *Bordetella pertussis*.
- The body makes antibodies to fight off the pertussis bacteria in the vaccine.
- These antibodies remain in the body's immune system.
- If the body is exposed to pertussis bacteria, the antibodies respond and fight it off.
- Protection from pertussis decreases over time.
- Vaccination with a booster is needed to stay protected.
- The risks associated with pertussis, tetanus or diphtheria infection are far greater than the possible side effects of the DTaP and Tdap booster vaccines that prevent these deadly diseases among young children, adolescents and adults.
- The Tdap booster vaccine extends protection against tetanus and diphtheria as well as pertussis among adults and adolescents.





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