

Ross County



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## Fact Sheet

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# PERTUSSIS

## Whooping Cough

**What is pertussis?** Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*. It is also commonly known as whooping cough.

**What are the symptoms?** Early on the symptoms will resemble a cold, including coughing and sneezing, a runny nose and even a low-grade fever. As the disease progresses, the cough will become more severe, and include episodes of “coughing fits” or a rapid succession of coughs. These are typically followed by a whooping sound as the individual tries to catch their breath, and can even lead to vomiting. This makes pertussis especially dangerous for infants and very young children.

**How is it spread?** Pertussis is spread by way of droplets released during coughing and sneezing, and also by contact with discharges from the nose or throat of the infected individual. Although very contagious, close contact is required, generally a distance of three feet or less.

**When might symptoms appear?** The incubation period can be as few as four days or as many as 21.

**Who is at risk?** Anyone at any age can be at risk for pertussis. Historically, it was more common, and more dangerous, in children. However, adults can also be infected, but their symptoms are often more mild and more difficult to identify.

**What about a vaccine?** The vaccine (DTaP) is standard for children and is given in a five shot series, with the final booster coming by age six, or when the child is ready to enter school.

**How is it treated?** Pertussis is treated with antibiotics and rest, as well as separating the infected person from others for a number of days. Those who have been in very close contact with an infected person, such as parents or siblings, should also be treated as a precaution.

**What should I do if I think my child or myself has been exposed?** If you think you or a loved one has been exposed, a visit to the doctor is in order. However, remember that it usually requires close contact for the disease to spread. If symptoms are present, separate the infected person from others and seek medical care.

**Is pertussis common?** Decades ago pertussis was one of the most common childhood ailments. However, once the vaccination became required the number has dropped significantly. Recently, there has been a slight increase in the number of cases reported, to include adults. It is important that children continue to be vaccinated and that anyone who shows symptoms seek medical care. In Ohio in 2005, there were 1,185 confirmed cases.

**Where can I find more information?** Our Web site, [www.rosscountyhealth.com](http://www.rosscountyhealth.com) has fact sheets, and you can also find information at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).