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Division of Health

FACTS & details

about Sedgwick County Government

February 2018

## Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

### What is pertussis?

Pertussis, also known as "whooping cough," is a contagious disease caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*.

### How common is pertussis?

Since the introduction of pertussis vaccines in the U.S. in the 1940's, pertussis cases have decreased significantly. Pertussis cases still occur in communities across the U.S.

### How do people become infected?

The bacterium that causes pertussis is spread from person to person by sneezing or coughing while in close contact with infected people. Infection occurs when a person contacts saliva or nose secretions directly on their face. Many infants who get pertussis are infected by older siblings or parents who might not know they have the disease.

### What are the signs and symptoms of pertussis?

The first symptoms resemble a common cold and include runny nose; low-grade fever; a mild, occasional cough; and, in infants, apnea (pause in breathing). After one to two weeks, more severe symptoms develop that include coughing fits (paroxysms) of many rapid coughs that can be followed by a high-pitched "whoop," vomiting after coughing, and exhaustion after coughing. Coughing occurs more often at night and can last up to 10 weeks or more. A more mild illness can occur in adults and in people who have been vaccinated. Recovery from the coughing fits can happen slowly. If you or your child develop a severe cough or a cough that lasts for a long time, contact your healthcare provider.

### How long can a person spread the pertussis bacteria?

After exposure, symptoms usually appear in five to ten days. Someone with pertussis is contagious when they begin coughing until three weeks after their cough starts or until they complete antibiotic treatment.

### Who is at risk for pertussis?

People who are not vaccinated are at risk of pertussis. Infants less than one year old and young children are at increased risk for severe disease. About half of babies with pertussis are hospitalized.

### How is pertussis treated?

Pertussis is treated with antibiotics. After completing treatment, the infected person can no longer spread the disease, but will likely continue to cough. Infants and those with severe disease often require hospitalization.

### How can you prevent pertussis?

The best way to prevent pertussis is to be vaccinated with the diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTaP and Tdap) vaccines. If someone is infected, those in the same household or in close contact should see a medical provider to receive preventative antibiotics.

Make sure your shots are up to date. Pertussis vaccine can be obtained from the Sedgwick County Division of Health, 2716 West Central Avenue, Wichita, Kansas.

- The childhood vaccine DTaP is given in five doses. The first shot is given at two months old and the last of the five infant/child doses are given around six years of age or before starting kindergarten.
- The booster vaccine Tdap is given to a person when they reach 11-12 years of age, any older person who has not received it, and to pregnant women in each pregnancy or immediately after delivery.

### For More Information:

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