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[Whooping Cough \(Pertussis\) Information for Adults](#)

What is Whooping Cough (Pertussis)?

Whooping cough, medically known as Pertussis, is a serious infection that spreads easily from person to person. The infection causes coughing spells so severe that it can be hard to breathe, eat or sleep. It can even lead to cracked ribs, pneumonia or hospitalization.

Pertussis has been on the rise in the United States over the last decade, although the vast majority of cases go unreported. While 48,277 cases were reported to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2012, experts estimate that the true number may actually be up to one million cases annually.

Symptoms

Early symptoms of pertussis are similar to the common cold or bronchitis and may include runny nose, sneezing and low-grade fever. The infection also causes coughing that lasts for weeks, even months. Sometimes a "whoop" sound occurs while gasping for breath during a bad coughing spell. However, the "whoop" is not always present; adults rarely have the classic "whoop."

Prevention

Whooping cough is most contagious before the coughing starts, so the most effective way to prevent it is through vaccination. The whooping cough booster vaccine for adults (and adolescents) is called Tdap (tetanus-diphtheria-acellular pertussis). Children get a different formulation, called DTaP. Both protect against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis. Two Tdap vaccines are currently licensed for use in the United States. One preparation can be used for adults but only until age 64.

Who should get the Tdap vaccine?

The CDC recommends that adults 19-64 years of age receive a single dose of Tdap in place of the Td (tetanus-diphtheria) booster previously recommended for all adults. In addition, the CDC has issued recommendations for specific adult populations:

- Adults who have or who anticipate having close contact with an infant <12 months of age (e.g., parents, grandparents less than 65 years of age, childcare providers, healthcare workers)
- Healthcare personnel in hospitals or ambulatory care settings who have direct patient contact.
- Priority is given to vaccination of workers in direct contact with infants <12 months of age.
- Pregnant women after delivery, before discharge from the hospital or birthing center.

Vaccine Safety

The Tdap vaccine is safe. Reactions to the vaccine are usually mild. The main reaction after vaccination is pain and redness at the injection site, low fever, headache, body ache and fatigue. Other adverse events are possible. Please consult with your doctor. A healthcare professional should be informed if you have developed Guillain-Barre syndrome within 6 weeks following a prior tetanus vaccination, if you are pregnant or nursing.

Some information used in this article was provided by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (www.nfid.org) and the Immunization Action Coalition (www.immunize.org).

> [Pertussis \(Whooping Cough\) Vaccination](#)

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