



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Steele County Public Health

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# Pertussis: What Parents Need to Know

PERTUSSIS ACTIVITY HAS BEEN ELEVATED WITHIN THE SOUTHEAST REGION OF MN SINCE MAY OF 2016

## What is pertussis?

- Pertussis, or whooping cough, is an infection of the lungs that causes a persistent cough. Anyone of any age can get pertussis.

## What the symptoms of pertussis?

- Initial symptoms are similar to a cold (runny nose, sneezing, mild cough, possibly a low grade fever)
- After a week or two, the cough worsens and begins to occur in sudden, uncontrollable bursts.
- Children may make high-pitched whooping sounds when gasping for breath after coughing.
- Vomiting can occur following coughing.
- Coughing spells may continue for several weeks or months until the lungs heal.

## How is pertussis spread?

- Pertussis bacteria are spread through droplets produced during coughing or sneezing.
- Droplets don't travel very far through the air and usually only infect persons nearby.

## When and for how long can a person spread pertussis?

- Persons with pertussis can spread it to others in the first 3 weeks of coughing if not treated with antibiotics.
- After a person with pertussis has taken antibiotics for 5 days, he or she can no longer spread the disease.

## How long should someone with pertussis stay home from child care, school, or work?

- Persons with pertussis should stay home from child care, school, work, and other activities until they have finished 5 days of antibiotics, unless they have already been coughing for 3 or more weeks.

## How can pertussis be prevented?

- The best way to prevent pertussis is to be vaccinated.
- A pertussis vaccine booster (Tdap) is recommended for adolescents and adults.

- Ask your healthcare provider for more information.

## Why is my child still getting pertussis even though he has been vaccinated?

- Studies have shown that the immunity from the vaccine decreases after 2-3 years from the last vaccination, which is usually given before kindergarten.

## Is there a lab test for pertussis?

- To test for pertussis, the nasal passage is swabbed. The material on the swab is then examined in the lab for the presence of pertussis bacteria.
- Only persons with symptoms of pertussis should be tested!

## Who should receive antibiotic treatment or prophylaxis?


- Persons who have a positive test result and have been coughing for less than 21 days.
- Immediate family members and individuals at high risk of complications of pertussis infection may be recommended for preventative treatment.

## Should we ever close schools, recreation centers, or community centers due to pertussis?

- No. MDH does not recommend closing such facilities due to outbreaks of pertussis. There is no evidence that it prevents the spread of disease, as children/adolescents may congregate in other settings.

## Contact Information:

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