

What do I need to know about whooping cough?

If you have ever seen or heard a child with whooping cough, you will never forget the violent coughing and the “whooping” sound made when the child inhales for air. Whooping cough can cause complications like broken ribs, pneumonia, and even death. Infants and young children are most at risk for complications, which is why it is important for all those around them—parents, grandparents, and child care providers—to get the Tdap vaccine.

Here is what you’ll find in this newsletter:

- What whooping cough is and its symptoms
- How serious whooping cough is and how to prevent it
- Why you need a Tdap vaccine, where to get it, and possible side effects
- Where to find more information

**Questions? Contact the
Arkansas Department of Health
at 501-661-2169
or www.healthy.arkansas.gov.**

This newsletter was prepared by the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement with grant funds from the Arkansas Department of Health.

ACHI is a nonpartisan, independent, health policy center that serves as a catalyst to improve the health of Arkansans.



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What is whooping cough?¹

Whooping cough, also known as pertussis, is a contagious disease caused by a certain bacteria. It usually starts with symptoms like a cold. It causes uncontrollable coughing. Those with this disease often can't breathe and make a loud "whooping" sound when trying to gasp for air.

What are the symptoms of whooping cough?²

During the first 2 weeks, whooping cough often acts like a mild cold. You may get a runny nose, low fever, and mild cough. Symptoms can get much worse very quickly and last for months. You may have bad coughing attacks that lead to vomiting, trouble breathing, sweating, tiredness, and a "whooping" sound when you try to catch your breath. Coughing fits from whooping cough can last up to 10 weeks or more.

Many infants who get whooping cough are infected by their older brothers, sisters, parents, other family members, and child care providers.

Symptoms in infants and young children are often different. Instead of a cough, infants have apnea. Apnea is a pause in a child's breathing pattern. Infants and young children may also turn blue from lack of air, vomit from coughing spells, get very tired, or have difficulty eating and drinking.

Whooping cough sounds bad, but it can't kill me, right?³

Wrong. Whooping cough can cause serious complications, especially for infants and young children, and even death. Half of infants younger than 1 year of age who contract whooping cough are hospitalized. Of those who are hospitalized:

- 1 in 4 get pneumonia
- 1 or 2 in 100 will have convulsions
- 2 out of 3 will have apnea
- 1 or 2 in 100 will die

Although whooping cough is usually less serious in adults and teens, complications can still occur. Most complications are caused by the cough – like passing out, breaking a rib, or breaking blood vessels during a coughing attack. Other problems that may come from whooping cough are pneumonia, weight loss, and loss of bladder control.



Credit: Thomas Schlenker, MD, MPH, Chief Medical Officer, Children's Hospital of Wisconsin

How do I keep from getting whooping cough and spreading it to my kids?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend "cocooning"⁴ to protect infants and young children from getting this disease. To cocoon your kids or those you care for, follow these steps:

- Get a Tdap vaccine. It is the best way to prevent whooping cough. “Tdap” stands for the 3 diseases it prevents – tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis. You should get the Tdap vaccine at least 2 weeks before coming in contact with an infant.⁵
- Make sure that those around infants and young children—child care providers, babysitters, health care providers, grandparents, brothers and sisters—have gotten the whooping cough vaccine. Kids younger than 7 years should get a DTaP; those older should get a Tdap.
- Keep infants, young children, and others who may be at risk for complications away from those who are already sick and from those who have not had the whooping cough vaccine.

New parents and those with close contact with infants should get the Tdap vaccine at least 2 weeks before coming in contact with an infant.

I got a vaccine against whooping cough as a child. Why should I get the Tdap vaccine now?

Experts have found that the childhood whooping cough vaccine (known as DTaP) is effective, but the protection it offers for whooping cough decreases over time. This is why it is recommended that teens and adults get a Tdap vaccine.

You should get the shot if:⁵

- You never received a single dose of Tdap before.
- You are a child care worker or are around infants less than 12 months old.
- You are a new parent or grandparent and have not had the Tdap shot.
- You are a health care worker with direct patient contact.
- You are a pregnant woman in her 2nd or 3rd trimester.

Every 10 years, adults should replace getting a tetanus booster (Td) with the Tdap vaccine. This will maintain protection against whooping cough.

Where can I get a Tdap vaccine?

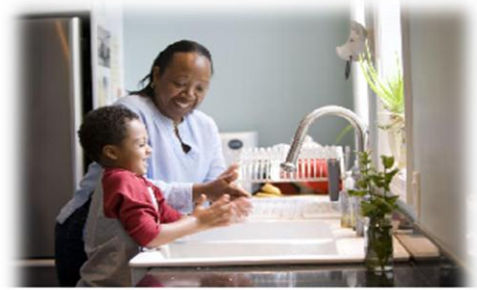
Pharmacies and clinics often offer this vaccine, but you should also talk to your health provider. You can also visit flushot.healthmap.org or www.vaccines.gov to find where the vaccine is available near you.

Aren't there side effects?

Like any medicine, there is a small risk of a side effect or bad reaction, but most are minor and go away within a few days.

Vaccines must go through years of testing before they are licensed to be used with people. Sometimes the process can take longer than 10 years! Once in use, vaccines are constantly checked for safety and effectiveness by the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration. Some side effects of the Tdap shot include the following:⁶

- Soreness, redness, or swelling where the shot was given
- Fever
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach ache
- Chills, body aches, sore joints, swollen glands



Credit: CDC/Cade Martin (2009)

Millions of people safely get vaccines each year and are protected from whooping cough. The number of people who have side effects is very small compared with the number who benefit from these vaccines. For more information on vaccine safety visit www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/index.html.

Where can I find more information?

If you are interested in learning more about whooping cough, the Tdap vaccine, and what you can do to prevent whooping cough, visit some of these organizations' websites:

- CDC (www.cdc.gov/pertussis)
- Arkansas Department of Health (www.healthy.arkansas.gov)
- National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (www.nfid.org/pertussis)
- Texas Department of State Health Services (<http://www.preventpertussis.org/>)

If you have any questions, please contact the Arkansas Department of Health by calling 501-661-2169 or visiting their website at www.healthy.arkansas.gov.

Sources:

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Pertussis (Whooping Cough). *Causes & Transmission*. Retrieved January 30, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/causes-transmission.html>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Pertussis (Whooping Cough). *Signs & Symptoms*. Retrieved January 30, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/signs-symptoms.html>

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Pertussis (Whooping Cough). *Complications*. Retrieved February 3, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/complications.html>

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Vaccines & Immunizations Vaccines and Preventable Diseases. *Tdap for Pregnant Women: Information for Providers*. Retrieved February 3, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/tdap-pregnancy-hcp.htm#cocooning>

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Pertussis (Whooping Cough). *Prevention*. Retrieved January 30, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/prevention.html>

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Vaccines & Immunizations. *Basics and Common Questions: Possible Side-effects from Vaccines*. Retrieved February 3, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vac-gen/side-effects.htm#td>