

# How serious can whooping cough be?

Whooping cough can make anyone sick, but there are certain groups who are very vulnerable to the whooping cough—like infants and young children. It's also very important for those who provide care like parents, babysitters, child care providers, health care providers, and others to get their Tdap vaccine to protect the children they care for.

Here's what you'll find in this newsletter:

- Three things you should remember about the whooping cough
- How you can prevent getting whooping cough or spreading it
- Where you can get a Tdap vaccine
- Where you can find more information

**Questions? Contact the  
Arkansas Department of Health at  
501-661-2169 or  
[www.healthy.arkansas.gov](http://www.healthy.arkansas.gov).**

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1401 West Capitol Avenue  
Suite 300, Victory Building  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201  
[www.achi.net](http://www.achi.net)

## You should remember 3 important facts about the whooping cough—it's serious, contagious, and deadly.

### **Whooping cough is serious.<sup>1</sup>**

Whooping cough may seem like a mild cold, but it is much worse. It causes bad coughing attacks that can lead to vomiting, sweating, tiredness, weight loss, loss of bladder control, turning blue in the face, and pauses in breathing in infants (apnea). It is named for the “whooping” sound most people make as they gasp for air between uncontrollable coughing. In China, whooping cough is known as the “100 day cough” as coughing fits can go on for up to 10 weeks or more.<sup>1</sup>

### **Whooping cough is contagious.**

Whooping cough is easily spread from person to person. If you have whooping cough, you can spread it to 12 to 15 other people.<sup>2</sup> Those with whooping cough usually spread it by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the bacteria that cause the disease. Most infants and young children who get whooping cough are infected by brothers, sisters, parents, child care providers and others who may not even know they have the disease.<sup>3</sup>

### **Whooping cough is deadly.**

In 2010, 27,550 cases of whooping cough were reported in the United States, but many more cases go undiagnosed and unreported. This was the most number of cases reported since 1959. In 2011, 18,719 cases were reported. Complications from the disease are serious and include passing out, breaking ribs, breaking blood vessels, pneumonia, hospitalizations, and death. Infants and young children who have not received their childhood vaccines for whooping cough are the most at risk for complications. Half of infants less than 1 year old who get whooping cough are hospitalized.<sup>4</sup>

To listen to what a child with whooping cough sounds like, visit [www.pkids.org/diseases/pertussis.html](http://www.pkids.org/diseases/pertussis.html) and click on the *play* button.

Many children deal with serious complications from whooping cough every year. To read some of these stories, visit [www.shotbyshot.org](http://www.shotbyshot.org).



Credit: CDC/Amanda Mills (2011)

## What can I do to prevent spreading it to children and others?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend “cocooning”<sup>5</sup> 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 three diseases it prevents—tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (whooping cough). You should get the Tdap vaccine at least 2 weeks before coming in contact with an infant.<sup>6</sup>
- 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 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.

Visit [flushot.healthmap.org](http://flushot.healthmap.org) or [www.vaccines.gov](http://www.vaccines.gov) to find out where you can get a Tdap vaccine.

## 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 these organizations’ websites:

- US Department of Health and Human Services ([www.vaccines.gov](http://www.vaccines.gov))
- CDC ([www.cdc.gov/pertussis](http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis))

*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](http://www.healthy.arkansas.gov).*

### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Signs & Symptoms. *Pertussis (Whooping Cough)*. Retrieved February 8, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/signs-symptoms.html>

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Pertussis Frequently Asked Questions. *Pertussis (Whooping Cough)*. Retrieved February 8, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/faqs.html>

<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Causes & Transmission. *Pertussis (Whooping Cough)*. Retrieved February 8, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/causes-transmission.html>

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Fast Facts. *Pertussis (Whooping Cough)*. Retrieved February 8, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/fast-facts.html>

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Tdap for Pregnant Women: Information for Providers. *Vaccines & Immunizations Vaccines and Preventable Diseases*. Retrieved February 3, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/tdap-pregnancy-hcp.htm#cocooning>

<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Prevention. *Pertussis (Whooping Cough)*. Retrieved January 30, 2013, from <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/prevention.html>