

# Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Fact Sheet

[www.sjcphs.org](http://www.sjcphs.org)

## WHAT IS PERTUSSIS (WHOOPING COUGH)?

Pertussis is a very contagious disease of the respiratory tract caused by bacteria. Pertussis is also known as “whooping cough” due to the “whoop” sound often made when the infected person tries to breathe after hard coughing and choking spells.

## HOW IS PERTUSSIS SPREAD?

Pertussis is spread through airborne droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. The greatest risk of spread is during the early stage when the symptoms resemble a cold.

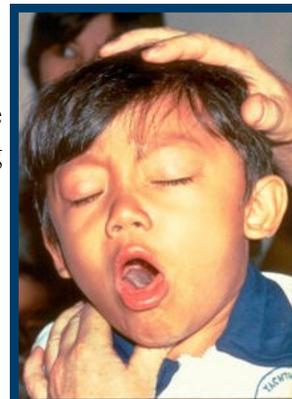
## SYMPTOMS OF PERTUSSIS:

- ◆ Low grade fever, runny nose, sneezing and occasional cough. In 1-2 weeks the cough becomes more severe.
- ◆ During bouts of coughing, the lips and nails may turn blue from lack of air. Vomiting can occur with severe episodes.
- ◆ In between coughing episodes people may feel and appear fairly healthy.
- ◆ In children less than 1 year old, complications include pneumonia, convulsions, and, in rare cases, brain damage. The majority of deaths from Pertussis occur in infants younger than 2 months of age.
- ◆ Many people cough for 1 month or longer.

## HOW IS PERTUSSIS TREATED?

- ◆ Call a doctor if you think you, or your children may have it or been exposed.
- ◆ An antibiotic is usually prescribed for treatment.

- ◆ Drink plenty of fluids to avoid being dehydrated.
- ◆ Carefully cover your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.
- ◆ Wash hands often using soap and water.
- ◆ Stay away from others, **especially** infants and young children, until you have been on antibiotics for 5 days.



Child with pertussis

## HOW CAN PERTUSSIS BE PREVENTED?

### FOR CHILDREN UNDER 7 YEARS:

The DTaP vaccine includes protection against pertussis. Children should get 5 doses of this vaccine; they need their first dose at 2 months of age. Additional doses are given at 4 months, 6 months, between 12–18 months and 4–6 years of age.

### IMMUNIZATION UPDATE FOR AGES 7 YEARS AND OLDER:

The pertussis containing vaccine, Tdap, is recommended as a booster for all ages seven years and older, particularly for people who have close contact with infants or pregnant women. It is required for all teens entering seventh grade of school.

### RESOURCES:

**San Joaquin County Public Health Services (PHS)**  
[www.sjcphs.org](http://www.sjcphs.org)

**California Department of Public Health (CDPH)**  
[www.cdph.ca.gov](http://www.cdph.ca.gov)  
<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Pertussis.aspx>

**U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)**  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/>