

# Whooping Cough (Pertussis) and the Importance of Childhood Vaccination

## Symptoms of whooping cough

Whooping cough (also known as pertussis) can cause these symptoms:

 **Mild fever** (less than 100.4 degrees)

 **Coughing fits**

 **Difficulty breathing**

 **Blue or purplish skin,**  
due to pauses in breathing

**Coughing can start 1 to 2 weeks after being exposed to the bacteria, and can last up to 10 weeks or more.**

Babies and young children may not cough but can still struggle to breathe.

## How serious is whooping cough?

Whooping cough is most dangerous for babies and young children. In fact, babies younger than 1 year old who have whooping cough may:

 **Be hospitalized**

 **Develop pneumonia** (a serious lung infection)

 **Have seizures**

 **Suffer brain damage**

The younger the baby, the more likely they'll need hospital treatment.

Whooping cough can even be deadly.

## How is whooping cough spread?

Whooping cough is a very contagious bacterial infection. Almost everyone exposed to whooping cough who doesn't have protection against it will get infected.

Whooping cough spreads when a person infected with whooping cough **breathes, coughs, or sneezes.**

A person with whooping cough can **spread the disease from the very beginning of the sickness** (when they have cold-like symptoms) and for at least 2 weeks after coughing starts.

Since symptoms can be mild for some people, **your baby can catch whooping cough** from parents, grandparents, or older brothers or sisters who don't know they have the disease.



## Whooping cough cases in the United States

Whooping cough cases are still reported in the United States. From year to year, whooping cough cases can range from roughly between **10,000** and **50,000**. Cases of whooping cough have been increasing since the 1990s, and outbreaks of whooping cough can occur.

Before vaccinations were recommended for all babies, **about 8,000** people in the United States died from whooping cough each year. Today, because of vaccination, **fewer than 20** people die from whooping cough each year.

### Vaccination is important

Vaccination is the best way to protect against whooping cough. There are two vaccines that help protect children against whooping cough: **DTaP** and **Tdap**. Both also help protect against diphtheria and tetanus.

CDC recommends that your child get **five doses of the DTaP vaccine** for best protection. Your child will need one dose at each of the following ages:

**2**  
MONTHS

**4**  
MONTHS

**6**  
MONTHS

**15–18**  
MONTHS

**4–6**  
YEARS

CDC recommends that your child get **one dose of the Tdap vaccine at age 11 through 12 years.**



CDC recommends pregnant women should get a Tdap vaccine during each pregnancy to pass protection to their unborn babies. This helps protect babies until they're old enough to get vaccinated themselves

### Side effects from the DTaP or Tdap vaccines are rare and usually mild

Most children don't have any side effects from the shot. The side effects that do occur are usually mild and may include:

- **Soreness, redness, or swelling** where the shot was given
- **Fever**
- **Mild rash**
- **Temporary pain and stiffness in the joints**

More serious side effects are rare. These may include high fever that could cause a seizure (jerking, twitching of the muscles, or staring).



*Seizures from a high fever don't cause any permanent harm and don't have any lasting effects.*



**Make sure your child is up to date on all recommended vaccinations.**

Talk to your child's healthcare provider to learn more and visit CDC's website.

Learn more about whooping cough:



View vaccine schedules:

