



# Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

## Management in School and Child Care Settings

### WHAT IS WHOOPING COUGH?

Whooping cough, also known as pertussis, is a contagious bacterial infection caused by *Bordetella pertussis*. Pertussis may be severe in infants and young children, especially those who have not had three doses of vaccine, resulting in hospitalizations, pneumonia, neurologic problems, and death. The cough may last as long as 3 months. Pertussis may not be as severe in adults and fully immunized children.

### WHAT ARE THE SIGNS & SYMPTOMS?

- Begins with cold-like symptoms including mild cough and low-grade or no fever (1-2 weeks)
- Cough becomes more severe, causing coughing spells or fits
- Coughing spells may be followed by vomiting, difficulty catching breath, face turning blue, and/or high-pitched whoop
- Appears well between coughing spells

### WHAT ARE THE INCUBATION AND CONTAGIOUS PERIODS?

Incubation period is usually 7 to 10 days, but can range from 5-21 days.

A person is most contagious in the early stages of the disease and will remain contagious for 21 days after cough begins or until five days of appropriate antibiotic treatment has been completed.

### HOW IS IT SPREAD?

The pertussis bacteria is spread through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or talks. Droplets do not remain in the air, but may travel up to 3 feet and can infect others when they land on or are rubbed into eyes, noses, or mouths.

### HOW DO YOU CONTROL IT AND TREAT IT?

- **EXCLUDE** individuals with pertussis until they have completed five days of antibiotic treatment or until three weeks after the onset of cough, whichever period is shorter.
  - If a close contact to a person with pertussis develops pertussis symptoms, they should be excluded from childcare/school until meeting the criteria above.
  - The CDC defines close contact as a person within 3 feet of an infected individual for at least one hour.
- An antibiotic to prevent infection is frequently recommended for child care/preschool classroom contacts and rarely recommended for school classroom contacts.
- Pertussis vaccination after exposure will not prevent infection; however, it may provide protection against future exposure. Review pertussis immunization records and recommend DTaP or Tdap vaccines for under-immunized students and staff.
- Follow the most recent ACIP immunization recommendations for children and adults.
  - Children >2 months should receive five doses of DTaP by 4-6 years of age
  - Children >10 years and adults should receive one pertussis booster (Tdap)
- The Colorado School Immunization Rules require all students older than 3 months of age to have pertussis immunizations or an exemption to immunization.
- The number of required pertussis doses varies by the age of the student.
- Additional information is available at: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/pertussis-whooping-cough>



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## EXCLUDE FROM THE GROUP SETTING AND WHEN TO READMIT?

- Pertussis is a highly contagious illness for which routine exclusion of infected children is warranted. Exclude infected students and close contacts (including caregivers and teaching staff) who are coughing until they receive appropriate evaluation and treatment with antibiotics.
- Readmit after 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment or until 21 days after the onset of cough (whichever is first).
- Readmit the child once cleared to return by a health professional AND when the child is able to participate and the staff members determine they can care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the other children in the group.

## WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF THE TEACHER/CAREGIVER AND THE FAMILY?

- Report the infection to the staff member designated by the childcare program or school for decision-making and action related to the care of ill children.
- Report the infection to the state or local public health agency by phone within **24 hours** of a suspected or confirmed diagnosis.
- Contact state or local public health agency for assistance if the school or childcare facility plans to notify parents/guardians about a case of pertussis in the facility.
- Monitor incompletely immunized children and staff members for respiratory signs or symptoms and recommend treatment if cough develops within 21 days of exposure to pertussis.

## Pertussis Resources:

<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/pertussis-information-schools-and-health-care-professionals>

Tye Harlow, Pertussis Epidemiologist  
P [303.692.2715](tel:303.692.2715) | [Tye.Harlow@state.co.us](mailto:Tye.Harlow@state.co.us)



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