

**Information Line Module  
Whooping Cough  
Recorded 8/20/04**

Currently, the Broome County Health Department is conducting an investigation of Whooping Cough or Pertussis cases in our community. Public Health routinely conducts investigation of infectious diseases to determine who may be ill and who may have been exposed. This is done to control the spread of the disease to more people in our community. The BCHD is concerned about the occurrence of Pertussis cases in Broome County but there is no need for residents to be unduly alarmed. If you or your children have been exposed to this illness, you will be contacted by the county health department nurse and given information about what you should do.

**What is Whooping Cough or Pertussis?**

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a highly contagious disease involving the respiratory tract. It is caused by a bacterium that is found in the mouth, nose and throat of an infected person. Approximately 300 cases are reported annually in New York State.

**Who gets Whooping Cough or Pertussis?**

Pertussis can occur at any age. Although most of the reported cases occur in children under five years, the number of cases in adolescents and adults is increasing.

**How is Whooping Cough or Pertussis spread?**

Pertussis is primarily spread by direct contact with discharges from the nose and throat of infected individuals. Frequently, older siblings who may be harboring the bacteria in their nose and throat can bring the disease home and infect an infant in the household.

**What are the symptoms of Whooping cough or Pertussis?**

Pertussis begins as a mild upper respiratory infection. Initially, symptoms resemble those of a common cold, including sneezing, runny nose, low-grade fever and a mild cough. Within two weeks, the cough becomes more severe and is characterized by episodes of numerous rapid coughs followed by a crowing or high-pitched whoop. A thick, clear mucous may be discharged. These episodes may recur for one to two months, and are more frequent at night. Older people or partially immunized children generally have milder symptoms.

**How soon after infection do symptoms appear?**

The incubation period is usually five to 10 days but may be as long as 21 days.

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**When and for how long is a person able to spread Whooping Cough or Pertussis?**

A person can transmit Pertussis from onset of symptoms to three weeks after the onset of coughing episodes. The period of communicability is reduced to five days after antibiotic therapy is begun.

**Does past infection with Whooping Cough or Pertussis make a person immune?**

One attack usually confers prolonged immunity.

**What are the complications associated with Whooping Cough or Pertussis?**

Complications of Pertussis may include pneumonia, middle ear infection, loss of appetite, dehydration, seizures, encephalopathy (disorders of the brain), apneic episodes (brief cessation of breathing) and death. Death is very unlikely. but when it does occur it is most often seen in infants under 6 months of age. Children who are vaccinated are less likely to become ill and if they do their illness will be milder.

**What is the vaccine for Pertussis?**

The vaccine for Pertussis is usually given in combination with diphtheria and tetanus. Immunization authorities recommend that DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, acellular Pertussis) vaccine be given at two, four, six and 15-18 months of age and between four and six years of age.

**What can be done to prevent the spread of Pertussis?**

The single most effective control measure is maintaining the highest possible level of immunization in the community. Parents should be certain that their children are fully immunized against Pertussis. Treatment of cases with certain antibiotics such as erythromycin can shorten the contagious period. People who have or may have Pertussis should stay away from young children and infants until properly treated. Treatment of people who are close contacts of Pertussis cases is also an important part of prevention.

Careful hand washing is one of the most important things people can do to prevent the spread of any infectious disease.

If you are concerned that you or your children may be ill with Whooping Cough, it is important to contact your medical provider.

The BCHD Communicable Disease Nurse is available to answer questions during regular business hours, 9 – 4, Monday – Friday by calling 778-2839.