



Date: Sept. 20, 2010

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## **Pertussis (Whooping Cough)**

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)— Pertussis, commonly referred to as whooping cough, is a highly contagious respiratory tract infection. Recently, there has been an increase in the amount of cases confirmed regionally, causing concern for many parents.

Though it may initially seem to be the common cold, pertussis can eventually become more serious, particularly in infants, if not treated. In the more advanced stages, it is marked by a severe, hacking cough that is preceded by a high intake of breath that sounds similar to a “whoop.”

“It is very common for patients to delay seeking medical attention for pertussis since the initial symptoms are very similar to that of a common cold,” explained Brian Bachelder, M.D., a family physician in Akron, Ohio.

Pertussis is caused by a bacteria, or germ. The most common way an individual develops whooping cough is from breathing in the contaminated air of a contagious person who sneezed or coughed and released the bacteria into the surrounding atmosphere. One can also become infected with pertussis if they touch a surface (such as someone’s hand) that is contaminated with the bacteria.

“Although pertussis can occur during any season, it seems to skyrocket in the fall and winter when people are in much more frequent and closer contact. This is due to its spread by small water droplets produced by sneezing and coughing,” Bachelder said.

Vaccination against whooping cough is part of the normal early childhood shots and boosters that children get before grade school. Children are not adequately protected until they have had at least three shots, which is why very young children are more at risk. A total of five shots is recommended for children by age 6. Protection from the childhood whooping cough vaccines begins to wear off five-10 years after vaccination.

It is recommend that most teens and adults get the Tdap booster vaccination for continued protection against whooping cough if they have not been vaccinated or if their shots are not up to date. Bachelder recommends that the best thing parents can do is get all of the childhood immunizations on schedule.

Bachelder also provided the best course of treatment that he advises for his patients.

“Good hygiene is the key; frequent hand washing, frequent cleaning of toys and keeping your young children home when they are ill. As they get older it is important to teach them to use their inner elbow to cover their mouth and nose when they sneeze,” Bachelder said.

*The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,200 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.*



## FACT SHEET

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### **To Prevent Pertussis:**

- A vaccination against pertussis is part of the normal early childhood shots and boosters that children get before grade school.
- Teens and adults can now get further boosters to prevent getting whooping cough.

### **How Can My Physician Tell if Have Pertussis:**

- They might ask you what the cough sounds like
- They may listen to your cough
- Some need a special test to detect the cough
- Chest X-rays and a blood draw also may be used to detect whooping cough.

### **What Should I do if I Have Whooping Cough?**

- Your physician will most likely prescribe antibiotics to make the cough go away faster and to help stop the cough from spreading to other people.
- Babies, younger than 1, may have to stay in the hospital to reduce the chance of further complications.
- Patients should stay home until their physician tells them otherwise.

Sources [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org)  
[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)