



South Central Public Health District

Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Twin Falls 737-5900 * Burley 678-8221 * Gooding 934-4477 * Bellevue 788-4335 * Jerome 324-8838 * Rupert 436-7185

PERTUSSIS (Whooping cough)

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is caused by bacteria that live in the mouth, nose, and throat of an infected person. Pertussis spreads very easily. It can cause very serious illness in infants and young children.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Pertussis starts with cold-like symptoms. These include sneezing, runny nose, low-grade fever, and a mild cough. Within two weeks, a severe cough can develop with violent coughing spells. A person with pertussis may have a hard time catching his or her breath during a coughing spell and make a “crowing” sound or high-pitched “whoop.” The person may vomit or cough up thick, clear mucus. These spells can happen for up to 10 weeks and are more common at night.

Adults, teenagers, and children who have received their shots usually do not get very sick.

How is pertussis spread to other people?

Pertussis is spread by direct contact with the discharges from the nose and throat of an infected person. This can be through droplets coughed or sneezed into the air by infected persons.

What is the contagious period?

Pertussis is spread very easily in the early stage and for about 3 weeks after the coughing spells begin. If a person with pertussis takes antibiotics, the disease can no longer be spread after 5 days, even though the person may still have a cough.

What is the time between being infected and becoming ill?

It is usually 7-10 days but may be as long as 21 days.

How do I prevent pertussis?

Protection from pertussis is best provided by complete vaccination with a series of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTP) immunizations beginning at age two months. Vaccinations are not given to individuals over 7 years of age. Immunity from vaccine may decrease with age. Older children or adults may not be fully protected from pertussis.

What should I do if I have been around someone with pertussis?

A doctor may recommend you take antibiotics to prevent you from getting ill. Anyone exposed should have their record of DTP immunizations checked by a physician. Some children may need to get a dose of DTP vaccine. Anyone who has cold-like symptoms or a cough after being near someone with pertussis should see a doctor as soon as possible.

Where can I get more information?

Call your physician or local Health District office for more information about pertussis.