



Public Health
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

Lincoln County

Pertussis Fact Sheet

October 2024

What is pertussis?

- Pertussis, also called “whooping cough,” is a respiratory disease caused by bacteria. It often causes serious problems in babies but is usually milder in older children and adults.

Who gets pertussis?

- Pertussis can occur at any age, but infants and young children are at the highest risk of life-threatening consequences. In Oregon, many pertussis cases occur in newborns that are too young to be immunized.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

- The first symptoms---runny nose, sneezing, mild fever and cough---usually appear five to 21 days after a person is infected.
- After one or two weeks, the cough gets worse and usually starts to occur in strong fits of coughing. This may last six weeks or longer.
- In children, coughing fits are often followed by a whooping sound as they try to catch their breath.
- After coughing, infected people may have difficulty catching their breath, vomit or become blue in the face from lack of air. The coughing spells may be so severe that it is hard for babies to eat, drink or breathe.

How is pertussis spread?

- Bacteria live in the nose, mouth, and throat, and are sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks.
- Touching a tissue or sharing a cup can also spread the disease.
- Older adolescents, adults and parents who may have a mild illness can spread the disease to infants and young children in the household.

Is pertussis dangerous?

- Pertussis can be very dangerous for infants who have the highest risk of pertussis-related complications and death.

How is pertussis diagnosed?

- A doctor may diagnosis pertussis based on symptoms and laboratory tests.

How do you treat it?

- Pertussis is treated with antibiotics.

How do you prevent pertussis?

Immunization is the best way to prevent severe illness related to pertussis. Children need a series of five DTaP vaccinations starting at 2 months of age until kindergarten. Immunity wears off, so adolescents and adults need a Tdap booster shot every 10 years starting at age 11. The booster helps protect adolescents and adults from getting pertussis and spreading it to vulnerable infants. Pertussis vaccines are required for school and childcare attendance in Oregon. Pregnant women should ask their health care provider about getting a Tdap booster in their third trimester of each pregnancy to protect their babies.

- Cover your cough and wash your hands often.
- Keep babies away from anyone who is coughing.

Is the pertussis vaccine safe?

- Yes, the vaccine is safe though there is a slight risk of problems such as a pain and swelling at the injection site or fever. But the risk of the disease is much more serious.

Is there any pertussis in Oregon?

- Yes, Oregon is currently facing extremely high rates of pertussis. As of October 1st, there have been 614 cases reported this year, compared to only 29 cases at this time last year

Where can I get more information?

- Ask your health care provider, contact Lincoln County Public Health, or visit the Oregon Immunization Program's website at www.healthoregon.org/imm.



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