



Central Michigan District Health Department  
“Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities”

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[www.cmdhd.org](http://www.cmdhd.org)

## **Pertussis** (Whooping Cough)

### **What is Pertussis (also known as “Whooping Cough”)?**

It is a highly contagious vaccine preventable contagious disease of the respiratory system caused by a bacteria called Bordetella Pertussis.

### **How does it spread?**

Pertussis is a highly contagious disease that is passed from person to person by respiratory secretions. After exposure to pertussis, symptoms may begin in about 10 – 21 days.

### **What are the symptoms and when do they appear?**

At first, early symptoms of pertussis may include cold symptoms, such as a runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever and a mild cough for about one week. In the second stage, which can last from 1 to 10 weeks, people experience episodes of numerous, rapid coughs with a distinctive sound. The cough is so harsh that many people wind up vomiting at the end of a coughing spell. Infants and young children often appear very ill and distressed and may turn blue and experience vomiting. In the third and final stage, which may last for months, people may experience episodes of numerous, rapid coughs, especially when they are diagnosed with respiratory infections.

### **When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?**

A person with pertussis is most infectious during the first stage of the disease and during the first three weeks after the cough begins. Antibiotic treatment taken as prescribed reduces the period of infectiousness.

### **How is Pertussis “Whooping Cough” diagnosed?**

Pertussis is diagnosed by a medical provider through a physical examination and possibly a laboratory test, which involves taking a sample from the nose.

### **Is there treatment for people diagnosed with Pertussis?**

Patients are given antibiotics to help treat the disease. Bed rest, fluids and controlling the fever and cough are also recommended.

### **How can Pertussis be prevented?**

Infants and children can be immunized against Pertussis by receiving the DTP or DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis) vaccinations. Adolescents and adults can be immunized against Pertussis by receiving the Tdap (tetanus and pertussis) vaccine. Please contact your medical provider or local health department for more information on these vaccines.