

Information about **Whooping Cough (Pertussis)**

November 26, 2007

Symptoms

Whooping Cough (Pertussis) is a contagious disease affecting both children and adults. Symptoms usually begin between 7 to 21 days from exposure with cold-like symptoms of sneezing and a runny nose followed by a persistent cough. As the cough progresses, it may occur in explosive bursts or fits which can be followed by gagging or vomiting, and may end with a high pitched whoop. These coughing fits can make it hard to eat, drink or breathe. Between coughing episodes, children and adults may appear well. There is usually little or no fever with this illness. Coughing attacks can continue for 6 to 8 weeks or longer.

How It Is Spread

Whooping Cough (Pertussis) is spread by direct contact with respiratory secretions (from nose and throat) or by handling articles directly contaminated by those secretions.

Prevention

Following proper respiratory hygiene can help prevent the spread of many germs, including Whooping Cough (Pertussis). It is very important to:

- ◆ Cover your mouth and nose when you are coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose. Cough or sneeze into your elbow to prevent contaminating your hands but if this is not an option, cough or sneeze into a tissue and then throw the tissue away.
- ◆ Clean your hands often with warm water and soap for 15 to 20 seconds or use alcohol-based hand cleaners.
- ◆ Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- ◆ Avoid close contact with persons who are sick.

Whooping Cough Immunizations (Shots)

Whooping Cough (Pertussis) Vaccine (DTaP/DTP) is given to children up to the 7th birthday. It is important that young children receive these shots starting at 2 months of age because they are at the greatest risk of developing severe symptoms and complications from the illness. The immunity from DTaP/DTP lasts about 10 years. This means teens and adults again become susceptible for disease.

In 2005 two new Pertussis-containing vaccines were licensed for persons aged seven years and older. One of these vaccines is recommended for persons age 10 to 18 years. The other vaccine is for persons 11 to 64 years.

What to Do

Children and adults who develop or have persistent coughs should see their family doctor or regular source of medical care taking this letter with them at the time of the visit. For more information about Whooping Cough (Pertussis), you may call the Yakima Health District at 249-6541.