



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pertussis A.K.A. The Whooping Cough:

The Cleveland County Health Department Encourages Parents and Caregivers to be Able to Recognize the Signs of Pertussis and to Take Proper Preventive Measures Against it

(Shelby, NC)—It is that time of year when many people must, unfortunately, battle the common cold. However, there is another infection that often first appears as the common cold that can be much more serious if not diagnosed and treated properly—pertussis (the whooping cough). The Cleveland County Health Department encourages parents and caregivers to be aware of the common signs and symptoms of the whooping cough and to call the doctor if you suspect that your child has whooping cough or has been exposed to someone with whooping cough. While the development of the pertussis vaccine has significantly reduced the number of whooping cough cases in the United States, there are still a minimal number of cases in the United States each year.

As stated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Pertussis (whooping cough) is an infection of the respiratory system caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis* (or *B. pertussis*). It is characterized by severe coughing spells that end in a "whooping" sound when the person breathes in. The first symptoms of whooping cough are similar to those of a common cold:

- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Mild Cough
- Low-grade Fever

After about 1 to 2 weeks, the dry, irritating cough evolves into coughing spells. During a coughing spell, which can last for more than a minute, the child may turn red or purple. At the end of a spell, the child may make a characteristic whooping sound when breathing in or may vomit. Between spells, the child usually feels well.

Although it is likely that infants and younger children who become infected with *B. pertussis* will develop the characteristic coughing episodes with their accompanying whoop, not everyone will. However, sometimes infants don't cough or whoop as older kids do. They may look as if they're gasping for air with a reddened face and may actually stop breathing for a few seconds during particularly bad spells. Adults and adolescents with whooping cough may have milder or atypical symptoms, such as a prolonged cough without the coughing spells or the whoop.

Prevention:

Whooping cough can be prevented with the pertussis vaccine, which is part of the DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis) immunization. DTaP immunizations are routinely given in five doses before a child's sixth birthday. To give additional protection in case immunity fades, it is now recommended that kids ages 11-18 get a booster shot of the new combination vaccine (called Tdap), ideally when they are 11 or 12 years old (CDC, 2011). Cleveland County Schools require that all fifth grade students receive the Tdap vaccine prior to admittance into the sixth grade. Contact your family doctor for the most current information on your child's vaccination history.

The CDC recommends that adults who did not get Tdap as a pre-teen or teen should get one dose of Tdap. Pregnant women who have not been previously vaccinated with Tdap should get one dose of Tdap preferably during the third trimester or late second trimester (after 20 weeks). Pregnant women not vaccinated during pregnancy should receive one dose of Tdap immediately postpartum before leaving the hospital or birthing center. Adults 65 years and older (grandparents, child care providers, and healthcare providers) who have close contact with infants should get a dose of Tdap. Getting vaccinated with Tdap – at least two weeks before coming into close contact with an infant – is especially important for families with and caregivers of new infants.

The easiest thing for adults to do is to get Tdap instead of their next regular tetanus booster—that Td shot that they were supposed to get every 10 years. The dose of Tdap can be given earlier than the 10-year mark, so it is a good idea for adults to talk to a healthcare provider about what is best for their specific situation.

When to Call the Doctor

Call the doctor if you suspect that your child has whooping cough or has been exposed to someone with whooping cough, even if your child has already received all scheduled pertussis immunizations. Your child should be examined by a doctor if he or she has prolonged coughing spells, especially if these spells:

- make your child turn red or purple
- are followed by vomiting
- are accompanied by a whooping sound when your child breathes in after coughing

If your child has been diagnosed with whooping cough and is being treated at home, seek immediate medical care if he or she has difficulty breathing or shows signs of dehydration.

For more information on pertussis, you may contact Sherry Yocum, Cleveland County Health Department, at 704-484-3134, sherry.yocum@clevelandcounty.com or visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/index.html>.

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