



# WHOOPING COUGH AND THE VACCINE TO PREVENT IT



**The best way to protect against whooping cough (pertussis) is by getting the diphtheria tetanus-pertussis vaccine (called DTaP). Doctors recommend that all children get the vaccine.**

## Why should my child get the DTaP vaccine?

The DTaP vaccine:

- Helps protect your child from whooping cough, a potentially serious disease, as well as diphtheria and tetanus.
- Helps to prevent your child from having violent coughing fits from whooping cough.
- Helps keep your child from missing school or childcare (and keeps you from missing work to care for your sick child).

## Is the DTaP vaccine safe?

Yes. The DTaP vaccine is very safe. Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. Most children who get the DTaP vaccine have no side effects.

## What are the side effects?

Most children don't have any side effects from the vaccine. The side effects that do occur are usually mild and may include:

- Redness, swelling, or pain where the vaccine was given
- Fever
- Vomiting

These types of side effects happen in about 1 out of every 4 children who get the vaccine.

More serious side effects are very rare but can include:

- A fever over 105 degrees
- Nonstop crying for 3 hours or more
- Seizures (jerking, twitching of the muscles, or staring)

## What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough—or pertussis—is a very serious respiratory (in the lungs and breathing tubes) infection caused by the pertussis bacteria. It can cause violent coughing fits. Whooping cough is most harmful for young babies and can be deadly.

## What are the symptoms of whooping cough?

Whooping cough starts with the following symptoms:

- Runny or stuffed-up nose
- Mild cough
- A pause in breathing in babies (apnea)

Coughing can start 1 to 2 weeks after being exposed to the bacteria. Children and babies may then begin to develop these more serious problems:

- Coughing very hard, over and over. These coughing fits happen more at night.
- Gasping for breath after a coughing fit. They may make a “whooping” sound. This sound is where the name “whooping cough” comes from. Babies may not cough or make this sound—they may gag and gasp.
- Difficulty breathing, eating, drinking, or sleeping because of coughing fits.
- Turning blue (while coughing) from lack of oxygen.
- Vomiting after coughing fits.

Coughing fits can last for 10 weeks, and sometimes happen again the next time the child has a respiratory illness.

## Is it serious?

Whooping cough is most dangerous for babies and young children. In fact, babies younger than 1 year old who have whooping cough may:

- Need to be cared for in the hospital
- Develop pneumonia (a serious lung infection)
- Have seizures
- Suffer brain damage

Whooping cough can even be deadly. Since 2010, up to 20 babies have died each year from whooping cough in the United States. Most of these babies don't have protection against whooping cough because they are too young to get the vaccines.

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Ask your provider or visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents) for more information.



# WHOOPING COUGH AND THE VACCINE TO PREVENT IT (Continued)



## How does whooping cough spread?

Whooping cough spreads easily through the air when a person who has whooping cough breathes, coughs, or sneezes. Almost everyone who is not immune to whooping cough will get sick if exposed to it. A person can spread the disease from the very beginning of the sickness (when he has cold-like symptoms) and for at least 2 weeks after coughing starts.

Since symptoms can be mild for some people, your baby can catch whooping cough from adults, grandparents, or older brothers or sisters who don't know they have the disease.

## Do people still get whooping cough in the United States?

Yes. Since 2010, between 15,000 and 50,000 cases of whooping cough are reported each year in the United States.

Before the whooping cough vaccines were recommended for all infants, about 8,000 people in the United States died each year from whooping cough. Today, because of the vaccine, this number has dropped to fewer than 20 per year.

But, cases of whooping cough have been increasing over the past several years, and outbreaks of whooping cough can occur. We don't know exactly why the number of cases is increasing, but we think it's a combination of many different reasons, including:

- Doctors and nurses are more aware of whooping cough and recognize it more often.
- The ways we test for the disease have gotten better.
- Protection from whooping cough vaccines is not long-lasting.



## Recommendations

Doctors recommend that your child get five doses of the DTaP vaccine for best protection. Your child will need one dose at each of the following ages:

- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- 15 through 18 months
- 4 through 6 years

CDC recommends the tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis vaccine for everyone 11 years old and older, including pregnant women. This vaccine for older children and adults is called Tdap.

## Where can I learn more about the Hib vaccine and my child?

To learn more about the DTaP vaccine, talk to your child's healthcare provider or visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents).



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