



SAINT LOUIS COUNTY
Missouri

Pertussis

More than just a cough



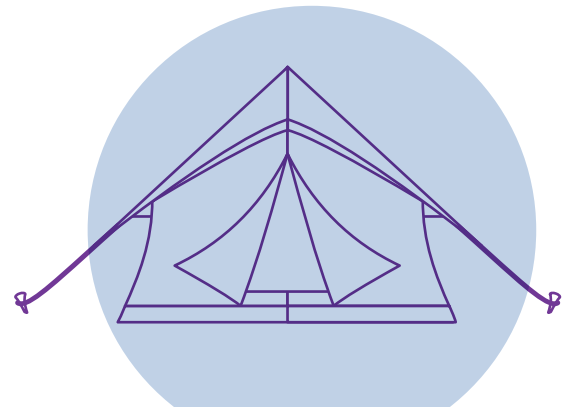
Pertussis, also known as **whooping cough**, is a highly contagious bacterial disease that causes severe coughing fits. It's caused by the bacteria **Bordetella pertussis** and spreads when an infected person coughs tiny droplets into the air and a susceptible person breathes them in. While pertussis is a vaccine preventable disease, cases can occur in fully-vaccinated individuals. In these cases,

symptoms are likely to be less severe than in someone who is unvaccinated.

Bordetella pertussis is circulating among Saint Louis County residents and lab-confirmed cases are on the rise, with the greatest concentration being in school-age children. This suggests that there are additional cases in the community that are going undiagnosed.



Pertussis is a reportable condition in Missouri. Schools and summer camps are required to notify local or state public health agencies if they are made aware of a case of a reportable illness.



Why are we concerned?

Pertussis rates in our area have been low since the pandemic and many healthcare providers are less familiar with how to diagnose and treat the illness. Because of this, we have been seeing delays in ordering diagnostic testing and often incomplete or inaccurate guidance about treatment, exclusion of cases, and management of close contacts.

Complications from pertussis include:

- Infants: Pneumonia
- Teens and adults: Bruised or cracked ribs, abdominal hernias, broken blood vessels in the skin or the whites of your eye

Symptoms

usually appear
7–10 days
after infection

After about
1–2 weeks
severe coughing can last
for more than a minute.

Pertussis is also known as the
"100-day cough"
Coughing fits can last
up to 10 weeks or more

What are the facts?

Pertussis is most dangerous in infants and can cause severe disease and even death in this age group. The CDC recommends that all babies and children, preteens, and pregnant women get vaccinated against pertussis.



You should call your doctor if prolonged coughing spells cause you or your child to:

- Turn red or blue when coughing
- Struggle to breathe or have noticeable pauses in breathing

Bacterial agent

Bordetella pertussis

Transmissibility

When an infected person coughs tiny droplets into the air and a susceptible person breathes them in

Incubation period

Range: 5 to 21 days (average 7 to 10 days)

Symptoms

- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Possible low-grade fever
- Cough
- Generally mild
- Often becomes paroxysmal ("coughing fits"), involve a high-pitched whooping sound, or result in vomiting. Symptoms are typically more severe in people who are unvaccinated or under-vaccinated
- Coughing attacks occur more frequently at night, increase in frequency/severity for the first two weeks of illness, and then gradually decrease over several weeks
- Infants may develop pneumonia and ear infections

Vaccine

DTaP vaccine in children and Tdap vaccine in adults. Cases can occur in fully vaccinated individuals. Symptoms are likely to be less severe if someone is up to date on their vaccines.

Exclusion

- Until five days after appropriate antibiotic treatment begins.
- IF NOT treated with 5 days of antibiotics, the case should be excluded for 21 days after cough onset.

Treatment

Typically treated with antibiotics, which are primarily used to reduce the person's ability to spread illness. Treatment works best when initiated early.

Antibiotic prophylaxis of contacts

Often recommended for household or high-risk (e.g., pregnant women, infants, immunocompromised people) contacts based on the judgement of their healthcare provider

Preventing transmission

- DTaP vaccine in children, Tdap vaccine in adults
- Cover mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing and proper disposal of used tissues
- Regular and thorough hand washing
- Stay home from school or work while experiencing a fever or persistent cough
- Clean and sanitize surfaces daily
- People who develop symptoms within 21 days of an exposure should stay home and consult their healthcare provider.

Because you are sometimes made aware of students with pertussis before the positive lab result is sent to the Department of Public Health (DPH), please notify us if you have a student who tests positive for pertussis. As previously noted, pertussis is a reportable condition in Missouri. Schools and summer camps are required to notify local or state public health agencies if they are made aware of a case of a reportable illness. Also note that, while **Bordetella pertussis** is reportable, **Bordetella parapertussis** is not. Students who test positive for parapertussis do not need to be excluded, although we do recommend that students who are experiencing notable cough remain home from school until symptoms lessen.

To report a case of pertussis, contact Sharifa Black at DPH
(314) 615-1603 or sblack@stlouiscountymo.gov