

## Pertussis

**Definition:** Pertussis, a respiratory illness commonly known as whooping cough, is a very contagious disease caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. These bacteria attach to the cilia (tiny, hair-like extensions) that line part of the upper respiratory system. The bacteria release toxins, which damage the cilia and cause inflammation (swelling).

**Transmission:** Pertussis is a very contagious disease only found in humans and is spread from person to person. People with pertussis usually spread the disease by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the pertussis bacteria. [Symptoms](#) of pertussis usually develop within 7–10 days after being exposed, but sometimes not for as long as 6 weeks

**Symptoms:** Early symptoms can last for 1 to 2 weeks and usually include:

- Runny nose
- Low-grade fever (generally minimal throughout the course of the disease)
- Mild, occasional cough
- Apnea — a pause in breathing (in infants)
- Paroxysms (fits) of many, rapid coughs followed by a high-pitched "whoop"
- Vomiting (throwing up)
- Exhaustion (very tired) after coughing fits

**Exposure:** Transmission by large droplets through coughing and sneezing

**Precautions and PPE considerations:** If Pertussis is suspected use gloves and a mask for respiratory protection. Also mask the patient being transported for your protection. Your unit should be de-conned after transport and all surfaces thoroughly disinfected.

**Treatments:** Tdap vaccination can protect healthcare personnel against pertussis and help reduce transmission to others. Priority should be given to vaccinating healthcare personnel who have direct contact with babies younger than 12 months of age

**Work Guidelines:** If you have active pertussis you should be excluded from duty through 5 days past the start of antimicrobial therapy. Personnel with an exposure who are symptomatic shall be excluded from duty through 5 days past the start of effective antimicrobial therapy. Personnel that are exposed but asymptomatic shall have no restriction from duty and are placed on antimicrobial prophylactic therapy. They can also be monitored for 21 days past the time of exposure and treated at the onset of any signs or symptoms.