

# What is Pertussis?

**Pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*.**

Infection can lead to uncontrollable coughing, which is sometimes accompanied by a “whoop” sound when a person tries to catch their breath.

Pertussis tends to be milder in adults and teens, so the “whoop” sound may not be present during coughing fits. Some infants with pertussis may not cough or make the “whoop” sound at all, but rather may experience periods of time where they **stop breathing**.



**In severe cases, pertussis can lead to pneumonia, seizures, and hernias.**



Pertussis is spread through close contact with others, such as coughing or sneezing next to someone, or by sharing personal items such as drinks or utensils.

Individual of any age can be affected, although pertussis is most common in children and infants. It is most severe in infants who are too young to be fully immunized against pertussis (i.e., infants under 1 year of age).

**Pertussis vaccines are safe and the most effective way to protect against pertussis infection.**

The pertussis vaccine is combined with other vaccines – commonly diphtheria and tetanus vaccines – meaning you get protection against multiple diseases in one shot.

**Talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or public health office about getting the pertussis vaccine for you or your child.**

