# Pertussis FACT SHEET

## What is Pertussis?
Pertussis is a very contagious disease of the respiratory tract caused by bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. Pertussis is also known as “whooping cough” due to the “whoop” sound made when the infected person tries to breathe after a hard coughing fit. The whoop may not occur in children younger than 6 months of age, vaccinated children, adolescents, and adults.

## What are the symptoms?

**Early symptoms:**
- Low grade fever, runny nose, sneezing and occasional cough.

**Later symptoms:**
- In 1-2 weeks the cough becomes more severe.
- During bouts of coughing, the lips and nails may turn blue for lack of air. Vomiting can occur with severe episodes.
- In between coughing episodes, people may feel and appear fairly healthy.
- Many people cough for 1 month or longer.

**Complications:**
- For infants, complications include pneumonia, convulsions, and, in rare cases, brain damage. The majority of deaths from pertussis occur in infants younger than 3 months of age.
- Complications in teens and adults include difficulty sleeping, pneumonia and rib fracture.

## How is it treated?

- Call your doctor if you think you or your children have been exposed.
- An antibiotic is usually prescribed for treatment.
- Stay home from school, work, and other activities until you have taken an appropriate antibiotic for 5 days.
- Drink plenty of fluids to avoid being dehydrated.
- Cover your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing.
- Wash hands often using soap and water.

## How is it prevented?

**Babies are the most vulnerable to Pertussis:**
Cocooning is critical protection for infants. Cocooning surrounds the infant with vaccinated people such as family, friends, childcare and healthcare providers.

**Vaccine for children under 7 years:**
The DTaP vaccine includes protection against pertussis. Children should get 5 doses of this vaccine. Infants need their first dose at 2 months of age, with 3 more doses given by 18 months of age. A booster dose of DTaP is given at 4-6 years.

**Vaccine for people 7 years of age and older:**
A dose of Tdap vaccine is recommended at age 11 or 12 years. This dose can be given as early as 7 years of age if the child missed earlier DTaP doses. All adults who did not get Tdap as a teen should get one dose.

**Pregnant women:**
Tdap vaccine is recommended for pregnant women. Contact your health care provider.

*Pertussis vaccines are effective, but not perfect. They typically offer good levels of protection within the first 2 years after getting the vaccine, but protection decreases over time.*