

Understanding Pertussis (Whooping Cough) in Adults

Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory infection characterized by a “whooping cough.” The whooping sound occurs when someone gasps for air after a fit of coughing. Pertussis is preventable, often goes undiagnosed and can lead to severe, sometimes life-threatening health problems such as exacerbation of chronic medical conditions – including asthma.

What Causes Pertussis?

Whooping cough is caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. It is a serious respiratory illness that is easily spread from person to person.

4x Greater Risk

While anyone can get pertussis, adults living with asthma are at increased risk of infection and complications.

4x

Whooping Cough Symptoms

Besides the iconic cough that has a ‘whooping’ sound, other symptoms include runny nose, nasal congestion, sneezing, fever and fatigue. Symptoms usually develop within five to 10 days after you are exposed. The coughing spells may result in loss of bladder control as well as retching and vomiting, which may lead to rib fractures. In severe cases, hospitalization may be required.



Preventing Pertussis

Vaccination is the best way to help protect against pertussis. A vaccine, Tdap, specifically developed for adults is widely available. It protects against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis and it is underutilized. Speak with your healthcare provider about getting a vaccination to protect against pertussis.

Like many respiratory illnesses spread by coughing and sneezing while in close contact with others, transmission can be prevented by keeping distance from others who are sick and maintaining these healthy habits.



- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze
- Put your used tissue in the garbage
- Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow (not your hands) if you don't have a tissue
- Wash your hands often with soap for at least 20 seconds
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if a handwashing station is not available

Visit [Lung.org/pertussis](https://www.lung.org/pertussis) to learn more.

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