

# Recognizing and Preventing Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

*This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.*

I'm Tami Skoff, mother of two and an epidemiologist with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Today, I want to talk to you about pertussis, which is more commonly known as whooping cough. Since the 1980s, whooping cough has been making a comeback in the United States. In 2005, more than 25,000 cases were reported across the country. So far this year, several states have reported significant increases in the number of whooping cough cases.

This highly contagious disease can be very serious for babies. Babies who get pertussis are often hospitalized, and sometimes they even die. However, it's not just a disease that affects babies; children and adults can have serious cases of whooping cough, too.

The symptoms can depend on how old you are and if you've been vaccinated, but the disease often starts with cold-like symptoms and a cough. Unlike a cold, someone with whooping cough may have a cough that lasts for weeks or months. They can cough violently and rapidly, over and over – gasping for air between bouts of coughing; this is what makes the 'whooping' sound. But not everyone has that hallmark cough. In infants, the cough may be minimal or even absent, but breathing can be interrupted. ANY breathing problem in an infant or child is serious, and you should call your doctor or go to the emergency room right away. There is antibiotic treatment for whooping cough, but it needs to be started early to be most effective.

The good news is that whooping cough can be prevented with vaccines. The vaccine is given to children in a series of five shots, starting when a child is two months old and ending with a booster shot before the child begins elementary school. While this vaccine, known as DTaP – D-T-A-P - can be very effective, the immunity—or protection given by the shot—wears off over time. This is why everyone 11 years of age and older needs another booster shot, known as Tdap, T-D-A-P. This is especially important for anyone who's going to have contact with infants. That's because moms, dads, older brothers and sisters, grandparents, babysitters -- really anyone --- can spread this disease to a baby without even knowing they have it. By getting vaccinated, you can help protect yourself and vulnerable infants.

If you're pregnant, planning to become pregnant, or have just given birth, talk with your doctor about getting vaccinated. Also, encourage others who will have close contact with your infant to get the booster shot. There's no need to risk spreading this potentially deadly disease to your newborn.

Some of you may not have heard about whooping cough, or thought it was a disease of the past, but it's definitely real and making a dangerous comeback. Vaccinating everyone can help slow down the spread of this disease and save lives.

For more information, please visit [www.cdc.gov/pertussis](http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis), P-E-R-T-U-S-S-I-S.

*For the most accurate health information, visit [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.*