

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)



Q: How common is whooping cough?

A: Even with the success of whooping cough vaccines, the disease is still common in the United States. Many cases are not diagnosed and so are not reported. Yet over the past 5 years, between 8,000 and 25,000 cases have been reported each year. Institutional outbreaks of whooping cough, such as those in a daycare center, school or hospital, are common, taking place each year in many states.

Q: Why is there more whooping cough in some years than others?

A: Reported cases of whooping cough vary from year to year and tend to peak every 3-5 years. Our last peak year nationally was in 2005 when more than 25,000 cases were reported. This pattern is not completely understood, but that's why it's important that everyone get vaccinated. If it weren't for vaccines, we'd see many more cases of whooping cough. It is too early to know if 2010 will be a peak year nationally.

Q: What should I do if I live in an outbreak area?

A: You can make sure you and your loved ones are up to date with recommended whooping cough vaccines. There are two types of whooping cough vaccines – DTaP for infants and children and Tdap for adolescents and adults. Getting vaccinated with Tdap is especially important for family members with and caregivers of new infants. Also, if caring for an infant, keep him or her away from anyone with cough or cold symptoms.

Vaccination recommendations:

- **Infants** and children are recommended to receive 5 doses of the DTaP vaccine at 2, 4, and 6 months, at 15 through 18 months, and at 4 through 6 years. All 5 doses are needed for maximum protection
- **Adolescents** are recommended to receive the Tdap vaccine at their regular check-up at age 11 or 12. If teenagers (13 through 18 years) missed getting the Tdap vaccine, parents should ask the doctor about getting it for them now
- **Adults** who are 19 through 64 years old are recommended to get a 1-time dose of Tdap in place of the Td booster they're recommended to receive every 10 years. No need to wait until you are due for your Td booster—the dose of Tdap can be given earlier than the 10-year mark since the last Td booster. It's a good idea for adults to talk to a healthcare provider about what's best for their specific situation.
- **Pregnant women** should ideally receive Tdap before pregnancy. Otherwise, it is recommended that Tdap be given after delivery, before leaving the hospital or birthing center. If a pregnant woman is at increased risk for getting whooping cough, such as during a community outbreak, her doctor may consider giving Tdap during pregnancy. Although pregnancy is not a contraindication for receiving Tdap, a pregnant woman and her doctor should discuss the risks and benefits before choosing to receive Tdap during pregnancy.
- **People 65 years and older** do not currently have a whooping cough booster vaccine licensed for their age group. However, people in this age group can talk to their healthcare provider to see if getting Tdap is a good decision for them. This discussion can include weighing the risks and benefits of receiving Tdap. Receiving Tdap may be especially important during a community outbreak and/or if caring for an infant.

Q: Should I delay travel to an area that is having a whooping cough outbreak

A: No, but those traveling to an area with a whooping cough outbreak should make sure they are up to date on their vaccines. People who are not vaccinated or who are under-vaccinated, including infants too young to be vaccinated, are putting themselves at risk for catching whooping cough.