

February 1, 2012



Tripartite First Nations Health Plan

Pertussis/Whooping Cough *Fact Sheet*

What is pertussis?

Pertussis or ‘whooping cough’ causes very severe coughing that may last for months. Whooping cough is very contagious and can be a severe illness in those without proper immunizations. Whooping cough spreads easily through the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or laughs. After the bacteria infect someone, symptoms appear about 7 to 14 days later. You may not know that you have the infection and can spread it during this time.

Early symptoms are like a cold (sneezing, runny nose, a low fever and a mild cough). But over the next week or two, the cough gets worse leading to longer coughing spells that often end with a “whoop” or crowing sound when the person breathes in. The coughing may be so bad that it makes a person gag or throw up. Sometimes a thick, clear mucous is spit out. The cough can last up to a month or two, and happens more at night.

What should you do if you (or your child) develop symptoms?

If you or your child develops cold-like symptoms that you think may be whooping cough, you should see a doctor in a clinic. Call ahead so that you can be seen quickly and not expose other people by sitting in a waiting room. You may also be examined in an isolation room (if available) and given a mask to wear, or arrangements may be made for you to attend the clinic at a time when the waiting room is empty. If your child is having difficulty breathing, go to the emergency room, your nearest community health centre call, or call 911. Bring your and your child’s immunization record with you.

What is the pertussis vaccine?

DTaP is the vaccine that protects against whooping cough and is given at 2 months along with the vaccines for diphtheria and tetanus in a single shot. Tdap is the booster vaccine available for people older than 10 years of age. A booster dose of Tdap is recommended for teens ages 14 to 16. Any adult in the Hope area who has close contact with a baby less than 1 year old, and whose last dose of pertussis vaccine was 5 or more years ago is eligible for free pertussis vaccination.



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What can I do to keep my family safe?

- Hand washing, when done correctly, is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Soap and water is the best way to clean hands and is superior to hand sanitizers. In communities with boil water advisories, the water is still fine for cleaning and hygienic purposes. Hand sanitizers may be used if there is no soap and water available.
- Sneeze and cough into your elbow or sleeve (not your hand), or use a tissue. After wiping or blowing your nose with a tissue, throw away the tissue and wash your hands. Keep your fingers away from your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Make sure all surfaces and items in your house are as clean as possible. Keep personal items separate if a household member is sick. Use a regular household disinfectant to clean surfaces around a person who is sick with influenza. Do not share personal items like toothbrushes or drinks.
- Even in conditions of crowding or reduced access to water, cleaning your hands, proper cough hygiene, and cleaning of household surfaces will help prevent the spread of influenza.
- If you or your child have early pertussis symptoms - sneezing, runny nose, a low fever and a mild cough - call your nursing station, or health centre or physician's office before going in for care. If you or your child are experiencing shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, you should go see a nurse or doctor right away.
- If you or your child has pertussis, you should stay home and isolate yourself from large crowds such as family and community members. If you are caring for a family member who is sick with pertussis symptoms, their contact with others should also be very limited - ideally with as few caregivers as possible. If possible, an ill family member should be in a separate bedroom from those who are not ill.
- Ensure you and your child are up to date with routine immunizations.

For more information about pertussis: Please contact your local Community Health Nurse, health care worker, community health centre, or call Health Link B.C. at 8-1-1 with any questions you have related pertussis and vaccination clinics.

Or visit:

<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/kb/content/mini/hw65653.html#hw65655>

<http://www.bccdc.ca/dis-cond/a-z/w/WhoopingCough/overview/default.htm>