**Pertussis Fact Sheet**

**What is pertussis and what causes it?**

Pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, is caused by a highly contagious bacteria, Bordetella pertussis. The infection is characterized by severe coughing, and it is one of the most common vaccine-preventable diseases in the United States.

**What are the symptoms of pertussis?**

Symptoms of pertussis usually begin 7-10 days (but up to 21 days) after a person has come in contact with the bacteria and can last for 6-10 weeks or longer. The first symptoms of pertussis are similar to a cold: a runny nose, sneezing, possibly a low-grade fever and a cough. After 1 or 2 weeks, the cough becomes severe as noted by the following:

* The cough occurs in sudden, uncontrollable bursts where one cough follows the next without a break for breath.
* Some children will make a high-pitched whooping sound when breathing in after a coughing episode. Whooping is less common in infants and adults.
* Coughing episodes may cause vomiting.
* Young infants may not cough but instead have difficulty feeding, gagging, vomiting and apnea (periods where infant stops breathing).
* Children may appear well in between coughing episodes.

**How does pertussis spread?**

Pertussis is spread in the air through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. In general, a person is at greatest risk of getting the disease if they are in close contact with someone with pertussis for a prolonged period of time. Typically, people older than 1 year are contagious from onset of cold-like symptoms until 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment has been completed (21 days after cough onset if no, or partial treatment given). Infants under 1 year are considered infectious for 6 weeks if no or partial treatment given.

**How is pertussis treated?**

Antibiotics, if started early, may help reduce the severity of symptoms. Treatment with antibiotics will also help prevent the spread of the bacteria to others. High risk close contacts of a person with pertussis should receive antibiotics to prevent them from getting sick; this is called prophylaxis and doctors and the local health department recommends who should receive it.

**How can you prevent the spread of pertussis?**

Routine vaccination is the best way to prevent pertussis. There are two pertussis vaccines (DTaP and Tdap). Both are given in combination with tetanus and diphtheria. Children younger than 7 years old get DTaP, while older children, teens, and adults get Tdap. Women should get a Tdap vaccine during the third trimester of each pregnancy to help protect their baby early in life. Additional steps to prevent the spread of disease may include:

* Avoiding close contact with others who are coughing or ill
* Washing hands often
* Covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or cough and sneeze into your sleeve
* Stay at home if ill
* Seek medical attention if pertussis-like symptoms develop