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## Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

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**Description:** Whooping Cough is a highly contagious disease caused by bacteria. The illness may begin with “cold-like” symptoms which progress to a cough or the child may simply begin coughing. After several days, severe coughing fits may cause the child to vomit after coughing or to lose his breath. Sometimes a high-pitched crowing (the whoop) is heard when inhaling. The coughing can last one-three months. Diagnosis is made by a laboratory test or by a physician. Pertussis is particularly serious in children under age 2 and hospitalization is usually necessary.

**How it is Spread:** Transmission is by direct contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person.

**Incubation Period:** Commonly five to 10 days, and not more than 21 days.

**How Long Can a Person Pass the Infection to Others?** The infection is highly contagious in the early stages. The child is no longer infectious to others five days after starting antibiotic treatment.

### **Responsibilities of Parents and Caregivers:**

- Notify the local health department if a doctor has said it is pertussis. (See ODH Communicable Disease Chart)
- Parents should notify caregiver about their child’s illness.
- Caregiver should inform parents immediately if their child exhibits symptoms. Parents should then consult their doctor or clinic immediately.
- Parents of contacts should be notified of their child’s exposure and advised to contact their doctor or clinic.

**Control of Spread:** Pertussis is a very serious illness. A child with pertussis must be excluded from the child care facility until after five days of antibiotics or until after three weeks after onset of intense coughing in accordance with rules of the local health department. The local health department may recommend antibiotics or booster shots of DTaP for contacts. Check non-immunized students for potential exclusion during epidemic.

**Treatment:** Antibiotic therapy.

**Comments:** Protection from whooping cough is best provided by adequate immunization with DTaP vaccine, starting at age 2 months, again at 4 months, 6 months, 15 months and age 4 to 6 years. Adults and teenagers are susceptible to the illness as well and may carry the bacteria while exhibiting only mild symptoms. Recent recommendations include a new pertussis vaccine (Tdap) for adults and teenagers.