

## **Pertussis Fact Sheet**

### **What is pertussis?**

Pertussis is a highly contagious, vaccine-preventable disease that lasts for many weeks. It typically presents in children as spasms of severe coughing, whooping, and post-coughing vomiting. In older children or adults the symptoms are usually milder.

### **How is pertussis spread?**

Occurs through direct contact with discharges from respiratory mucous membranes (nose and mouth) of infected persons.

### **Who is most at risk of infection?**

Children who are too young to be fully vaccinated and those who have not completed the primary vaccination series are at highest risk for severe illness. Like measles, pertussis is highly contagious with up to 90% of susceptible household contacts developing clinical disease following exposure to an index case. Adolescents and adults become susceptible when immunity wanes.

### **How can a person prevent this illness?**

Vaccination is the best prevention.

### **When are vaccines given?**

Four shots are needed to insure full immunity to this illness. They are usually given at ages 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, and 15-18 months.

### **Are there long term consequences to pertussis?**

Major complications are most common among infants and young children and include hypoxia, apnea, pneumonia, seizures, encephalopathy, and malnutrition. Young children can die from pertussis and 13 children died in the United States in 2003. Most deaths occur among unvaccinated children or children too young to be vaccinated.

For more information please visit: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)