

# Pertussis

## PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

### *What is Pertussis?*

It is a highly contagious disease of the respiratory tract. It is caused by a bacterium that is found in the mouth, nose, and throat of an infected person. Pertussis can occur at any age. Severe illness is more common in young children. Because symptoms resemble a cold with a nagging cough, the disease is hard to diagnose.

### **How is it spread?**

Pertussis is spread when infected people cough or sneeze, expelling droplets that contain Pertussis germs. Touching contaminated objects such as tissues or cups can also spread the disease. Infants often get the disease from older siblings. A person can transmit the disease from 7 days following exposure to about 3 weeks after onset of coughing episodes.

### **How is it treated?**

Antibiotics can make the disease milder and will help prevent the spread of the illness. Even if they were vaccinated, household and other close contacts should be given antibiotics to prevent the disease. Treatment for children may include supportive therapy, such as fluids, oxygen, and mild sedation.

### **How can we prevent Pertussis?**

The single most effective way to prevent Pertussis and its spread is by achieving the highest level of immunization in the community. Until properly treated, ill people should stay away from others, especially young children and infants.

- ▶ The vaccine should be given at two, four, six months, and 15-18 months of age, with an additional dose at 4-6 years of age.

### **SYMPTOMS OF PERTUSSIS**

After exposure, the first symptoms usually appear within 7-10 days, but may be as long as 21 days.

#### **The Initial Symptoms**

- ▶ Resemble the common cold
- ▶ Sneezing
- ▶ Runny nose
- ▶ Low-grade fever
- ▶ Mild cough

#### **After a couple of weeks, the symptoms increase to:**

- ▶ Intense coughing spells
- ▶ Vomiting
- ▶ A high-pitched whooping cough
- ▶ Discharge of mucous

The symptoms may last for one to two months and are more frequent at night.



**DICKINSON-IRON DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

[www.didhd.org](http://www.didhd.org)

**818 Pyle Drive  
Kingsford, MI 49802  
(906) 774 1868**

**601 Washington Avenue  
Iron River, MI 49935  
(906) 265 9913**