

# Pertussis

Ashanda Saint Jean, MD



## Q: What is pertussis, and how does it affect infants?

Pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, is known for its characteristic cough. It is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by bacteria that is spread through coughing and sneezing, which can resemble a common cold. In severe cases, such as those often seen in infants, pertussis can require hospitalization and lead to complications such as pneumonia and life-threatening breathing problems.

## Q: When are children most vulnerable to pertussis?

Infants are most vulnerable in their first two months of life because their immune systems are not fully developed, and they are not yet eligible to be vaccinated against pertussis. Infants can be especially vulnerable when they come into contact with others, such as at daycare, when new parents go back to work.

## Q: What tools are available to protect infants from pertussis?

The most effective tools available to protect infants are vaccines. The Tdap vaccine protects against pertussis, tetanus and diphtheria. Since infants are unable to get vaccinated before two months, family members should be vaccinated to protect the infant during their most vulnerable time.

Education about pertussis is also a vital way to protect infants against the disease. Parents should know the early warning signs so their infant can receive early treatment.

AI and new technologies have created more effective methods of monitoring and tracking vaccine uptake. This helps make sure that milestone appointments are made and that people do not get lost in the online system.



**The most effective tools available to protect infants are vaccines. The Tdap vaccine protects against pertussis, tetanus and diphtheria.**



**“There are a lot of information pathways out there, but one that holds true is having a conversation with your provider.”**

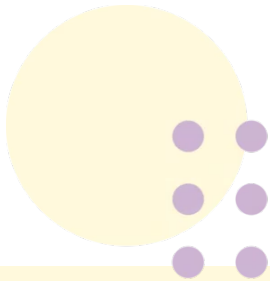


**Q: What are the differences in the available treatments for pertussis?**

Differences in treatment depend on the severity and progression of the illness. There are several antibiotics available to treat pertussis; however, hospitalization and imaging, such as a chest x-ray, may be required if the illness progresses.

**Q: Why is continued vaccination important to protect against pertussis?**

Over time, antibodies can become less robust, and immunity ultimately wanes. That is why additional Tdap vaccines, known as boosters, are given every ten years. Tdap boosters are also given during every pregnancy. These booster vaccines help protect the patient and other people they come into contact with, including those who are immunocompromised or cannot receive the vaccine, such as newborns and the elderly.



The National Coalition for Infant Health is a collaborative of professional, clinical, community and family support organizations.

The coalition focuses on education and advocacy promoting patient-centered care for all infants—whether born preterm or full term—and their families.

**infanthealth.org**

