

What Every Katy Parent Needs to Know About Whooping Cough

With Pertussis cases on the rise, find out what you can do to prevent, identify, and treat this potentially life-threatening disease

Written by Taryn Burnett, Susanna Donald, and Katrina Katsarelis

Pertussis, a disease once thought to be eradicated, has recently made a big comeback, causing concern for parents across Texas and the U.S. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that pertussis cases peak every three to five years, but over the past 20 to 30 years the peaks are steadily getting higher and overall case counts are going up. In the last year alone, Texas experienced a two- to three-fold increase in its number of reported whooping cough cases.

What Is Pertussis?

Also known as whooping cough, pertussis is a highly contagious bacterial respiratory infection that mainly affects infants younger than 6 months and kids 11 to 18 years old whose immunity from vaccinations has diminished. Anyone can get whooping cough, but infants have the highest incidence of complications from the disease.

Grace Leonardo, a doctor at Steeplechase Pediatrics in Katy, says that before vaccines were widely available, infants and young children were the most vulnerable victims with the highest number of whooping cough diagnoses. “Now, the higher percentage of pertussis occurs in adolescents and adults who haven’t kept up with their vaccinations,” she says. This is particularly problematic because of how contagious the virus is. Whooping cough is often spread by family members or people who live in the same household.

Who Needs Vaccinations?

“The vaccine is recommended for infants starting at 2 months old, children, teens, pregnant women, and adults,” says Leonardo. “The DtaP is the vaccine for infants and children, and the Tdap begins around age 11 and

continues every 10 years thereafter.” According to the CDC, getting vaccinated with Tdap is especially important for family members and caregivers of new infants because of the disease’s high rate of transmission.


What many people don’t realize, doctors note, is that the protection the vaccine gives decreases over time, so preteens, teens, and adults all need to be revaccinated, even if they were vaccinated as children. Dr. Farah Mamedov, with Steeplechase Pediatrics, agrees, “The bottom line is that the best way to protect yourself and your family from getting sick is to get vaccinated, especially if you are around babies or pregnant women.”

The CDC recommends vaccinations for infants, children, preteens, teens, and adults. For babies, the first whooping



Whooping Cough Warning Signs

At first, it can be hard to identify because it’s similar to a cold. In infants, it may start with mild coughing and a pause in breathing (apnea). It progresses into many, rapid coughs followed by a high-pitched “whoop” sound. It’s most contagious in the early stages so see your pediatrician or physician early if you suspect whooping cough.



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*- Dr. Farah Mamedov,
pediatrician at Steeplechase
Pediatrics*



According to the CDC, pertussis can cause serious illness in infants, children, and adults and can even be life-threatening, especially in infants

cough vaccine is given at 2 months old, with another at 4 months old. The CDC vaccine schedule suggests three more doses of DTap: at 6 months, 14 months, and 4 years of age.

Highest Risk

Generally speaking, most children who are fully vaccinated are protected by the vaccine, so it is those who cannot receive the vaccine who are most vulnerable. “Infants under 6 months, who are not fully protected by immunizations, are at greatest risk for hospitalization and even death from whooping cough,” says Mamedov. Others who cannot receive vaccines because of compromised immune systems (like transplant recipients or childhood cancer patients) rely on those who can be immunized to help stop the spread of the disease. Doctors recommend that pregnant women be immunized with each pregnancy, because the vaccination helps the mother create antibodies that are then transferred to the baby in utero.

Preventing Pertussis

“All you need is to see a child suffering from pertussis and you will realize the importance of vaccinating against it,” says Katy area mom Wendy Calvert. For many families, there isn’t much discussion when it comes to being vaccinated for whooping cough. “We were vaccinated to help protect our kids from getting the virus,” says Kelly Stevens. “We heard that whooping cough was really bad, and our kids were extremely premature - born at 24 weeks. We wanted to protect them.”

Parents can also reduce the risk of exposure by keeping young infants away from people with cold-like symptoms. Adults often don’t realize they have whooping cough because it is like a bad case of bronchitis. Patients who exhibit possible signs of whooping cough are typically sent to the hospital for testing and observation.

While it is still possible to contract pertussis after being vaccinated, the disease is usually much less severe and often shorter-lived.
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Diagnosis and Treatment

The doctor may diagnose it by listening to the cough or ordering a nose or throat culture, blood test, or chest X-ray. It’s treated with antibiotics, which help control the symptoms and prevent spreading.



Get Checked

Complications and Deaths

Most will be hospitalized; 1 in 5 people will get pneumonia, 1 in 100 will have convulsions, 1 in 300 will have encephalopathy, and 1 in 100 will die. About 90% of pertussis deaths are infants. Cases in teens and adults are much less severe, especially if they have been immunized.

* NOTE: Some children infected with the bacteria will not develop the characteristic coughing spells and whooping sound.

Reported Cases of Pertussis in the U.S.

1959	2010	2011	2012
40,000 cases	27,500 cases	18,719 cases	41,000 cases

Visit cdc.gov/pertussis to find out more