

Title: Prophylactic antibiotics do not prevent whooping cough symptoms in the household contacts of children diagnosed with whooping cough

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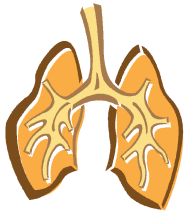
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Abstract: Whooping cough causes coughing attacks associated with making a "whoop" sound after coughing, turning blue or stopping breathing for a few moments. If a child in a family is diagnosed with whooping cough, treating the rest of the family with erythromycin does not prevent the rest of the family from developing these whooping cough symptoms.

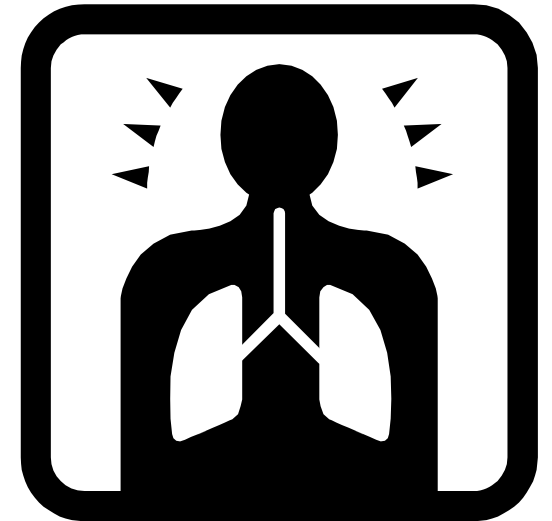
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What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough is a disease of the lungs and airways caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. It is called whooping cough because some people make a whooping noise when they breathe in after coughing. This disease is spread from person to person. Infants receive a vaccine to prevent this disease and most people are protected. But, the effect of the vaccine does get weaker with age. Older people and people who have never had the vaccine are at the most risk of getting whooping cough.



Whooping Cough



What are the symptoms of whooping cough?

Whooping cough has three separate stages:

1. During the first stage (the catarrhal stage), a person has cold symptoms such as a runny nose, red eyes, fatigue and a low fever. This can last for 1-2 weeks.
2. During the second stage (the paroxysmal stage), people develop bursts of coughing that can be followed by a whooping noise, vomiting, or even turning blue. Coughing attacks occur multiple times per day and are separated by periods of no coughing. This can last from 1-6 weeks.
3. During the final stage (the convalescent stage), the cough symptoms gradually improve. This can take up to 3 months.

How does a doctor diagnose whooping cough?

A doctor will suspect whooping cough based on the pattern of symptoms. A doctor can then do a test to look for the germ that causes the disease. This test involves using a special q-tip to swab the inside of the nose of the person who is sick.

Are antibiotics helpful?

Unfortunately, most people do not feel sick enough to see their doctor until they begin coughing. At this point in the disease, antibiotics do not help a person with whooping cough get better sooner but they may keep the germ that causes the disease from spreading to other people. Therefore, it is recommended that people with whooping cough get treated with antibiotics.

When someone has whooping cough, it is not clear if treating the other people in their family will keep the disease from spreading. Because antibiotics have side-effects, a doctor might not want to give medication to other family members.

Prevention

Even though a small number of people still get sick, the vaccine does a very good job of preventing this disease. To help keep children from getting whooping cough, it is important that all children get the vaccine. Also, in the last few years, teenagers and adults have started getting booster shots to keep the vaccine working. This booster can be given as part of the shot for tetanus.