



Health & Community Services

San Juan County

P. O. Box 607 - 145 Rhone, Friday Harbor, WA 98250

Phone: (360) 378-4474 Fax: (360) 378-7036

Whooping Cough Fact Sheet

What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a highly contagious bacterial infection, and one of the most common vaccine preventable diseases in the United States.

How does whooping cough spread?

Whooping cough is usually spread by coughing or sneezing. If untreated, an infected person can spread whooping cough for several weeks.

What are the symptoms?

- The disease usually starts with mild cold symptoms or a cough, which can turn into severe coughing spells. The coughing spells can take place for 10 weeks or more. Fever is usually absent.
- In infants, the cough may be mild or absent. However, infants may have a symptom known as "apnea," which is a pause in breathing.
- Infants and children can cough violently and rapidly, until the air is gone from their lungs and they're forced to inhale with a loud "whooping" sound. This extreme coughing can result in vomiting and exhaustion.
- Older children and adults may have milder symptoms. Vaccinated children and adults can become infected with and spread pertussis; however, disease is typically much less serious in vaccinated people.

Babies and whooping cough

Whooping cough is most dangerous in children less than 1 year of age. They often catch the illness from older siblings, parents, or other caregivers. **Pregnant women should receive the whooping vaccine in the third trimester of every pregnancy to protect their babies.**

How can I prevent whooping cough?

DTaP vaccine

Infants and children under 7 should receive the DTaP vaccine. To maximize protection, all 5 doses of DTaP are needed on time according to the recommended immunization schedule.

Tdap vaccine

Adolescents and adults need the Tdap vaccine. The protection received from DTaP, the childhood vaccine, fades over time. Adolescents and should get Tdap even if they were completely vaccinated as children. The Tdap vaccine is especially important for pregnant women, family members with and caregivers of new infants.

Confirmed cases and household contacts

If you have pertussis, avoid contact with others until you have taken 5 full days of the antibiotic treatment. Take all of your antibiotics. If you live with someone who has pertussis or attend the same childcare program, you should obtain preventive antibiotics from your physician.

Where can I get more information about whooping cough?

- San Juan County Health & Community Services: (360) 378-4474
- Washington State Department of Health
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/WhoopingCough/WhoopingCoughFAQ>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/index.html>