

## **FACT SHEET     PERTUSSIS (Whooping Cough)**

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### **What is pertussis (whooping cough)?**

Pertussis is a disease caused by bacteria. It causes severe spells of coughing. These spells can interfere with eating, drinking and breathing. Pertussis can lead to pneumonia, convulsions, inflammation of the brain (encephalitis) and sometimes death.

**Who can get pertussis?** Pertussis can occur at any age. It is most common in infants less than one year old, but anyone can get it. Pertussis can be hard to diagnose in teens and adults because their symptoms often look like a cold with a nagging cough.

**How is pertussis spread?** Pertussis is spread through the air after an infected person coughs or sneezes. Other people breathe in infected droplets.

**What are the symptoms of pertussis?** Pertussis starts like a cold with symptoms of runny nose and an irritating cough. Within one to two weeks the cough develops into coughing fits. The fits are a series of violent coughs during which the victim struggles for breath. A gasping for air, which produces a high-pitched whooping sound, follows the coughing. The coughing fits occur more frequently at night, and are often followed by vomiting. Between spells, the person usually appears to be well. Adults, teens, and vaccinated children may have milder symptoms.

**How long is an infected person able to spread pertussis?** Without treatment an infected person can spread the disease from the time he or she starts coughing until 21 days after the start of the cough. After five days of treatment with an appropriate antibiotic, an infected person cannot spread the disease.

**What is the treatment for pertussis?** Treatment with an appropriate antibiotic may help if given early in the illness. Other treatments such as fluids, oxygen, and mild sedation may help the child during the prolonged period of severe coughing.

### **Should people who have been around a person with pertussis be treated?**

All household and other close contacts of persons with pertussis, regardless of age, should receive an antibiotic to prevent them from becoming ill and spreading whooping cough disease.

### **How can pertussis be prevented?**

Pertussis may be prevented through routine immunization. Pertussis is spread through the air after an infected person coughs or sneezes. Other people breathe in infected droplets. Cover your mouth when you cough, stay away from others when they are coughing, wash your hands frequently. Ask your health care clinician/local public health department about vaccine for adolescents/adults.

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### **Oskaloosa School Recommendations:**

\*If your child has been diagnosed with or exposed to whooping cough, the minimum exclusion from school is 5 days after the start of antibiotic treatment.

\*If your child has a cough and you question exposure to whooping cough, please keep your child home from school and contact your doctor or Mahaska County Community Health at Ph.# 641-673-3257.