



Date: Sept. 23, 2008

Contact: Megan D. Smith  
Director of Communications  
[msmith@ohioafp.org](mailto:msmith@ohioafp.org)

## Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)— Pertussis, commonly referred to as “whooping cough,” is a highly contagious respiratory tract infection that can cause a person to cough for several minutes at a time.

Though it may initially seem to be the common cold, pertussis can eventually become more serious, particularly in infants, if not treated. In the more advanced stages, it is marked by a severe, hacking cough that is preceded by a high intake of breath that sounds similar to a “whoop.”

“It is very common for patients to delay seeking medical attention for pertussis since the initial symptoms are very similar to that of a common cold,” explained Brian Bachelder, M.D., a family physician in Mount Gilead, Ohio.

Pertussis is caused by a bacteria, or germ. The most common way an individual develops whooping cough is from breathing in the contaminated air of a contagious person who sneezed or coughed and released the bacteria into the surrounding atmosphere. One can also become infected with pertussis if they touch a surface (such as someone’s hand) that is contaminated with the bacteria.

“Although pertussis can occur during any season, it seems to skyrocket in the fall and winter when people are in much more frequent and closer contact. This is due to its spread by small water droplets produced by sneezing and coughing,” Bachelder said.

The most common cases of pertussis are being seen in young children who have not completed their full course of vaccinations and teenagers whose immunity has faded. With proper treatment, most teenagers and adults will recover from whooping cough without complications. However, among children and infants, especially those under six months old, pertussis is much more serious.

Most young children get the vaccination against whooping cough as part of their normal shots and boosters; however, there are now boosters that teenagers and adults can get to help prevent against whooping cough at an older age.

Bachelder also provided the best course of treatment that he advises for his patients.

“Even though antibiotics are prescribed, the infected person is still contagious and should avoid contact with other people until five days of treatment are completed. I also advise them that the medication does not shorten the course of the illness,” Bachelder said.

*The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,400 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.*



## FACT SHEET

Date: Sept. 23, 2008

Contact:

Megan D. Smith  
Director of Communications  
msmith@ohioafp.org

### **To Prevent Pertussis:**

- A vaccination against pertussis is part of the normal early childhood shots and boosters that children get before grade school.
- Teens and adults can now get further boosters to prevent getting whooping cough.

### **How Can My Physician Tell if Have Pertussis:**

- They might ask you what the cough sounds like
- They may listen to your cough
- Some need a special test to detect the cough
- Chest X-rays and a blood draw also may be used to detect whooping cough.

### **What Should I do if I Have Whooping Cough?**

- Your physician will most likely prescribe antibiotics to make the cough go away faster and to help stop the cough from spreading to other people.
- Babies, younger than 1, may have to stay in the hospital to reduce the chance of further complications.
- Patients should stay home until their physician tells them otherwise.

Sources      [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org)  
                  [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)