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Health and wellness tips for your work, home, and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at Bouchard Insurance.

Whooping Cough

Also known as pertussis, whooping cough is an infectious bacterial disease causing uncontrollable coughing. Its name comes from the sound emitted during coughing or breathing.

Cause and Incidence

Whooping cough is caused by the *bordatella pertussis* bacteria, which infects the lining of the breathing passages – most often in the windpipe region.

Although anyone can get whooping cough, it is most common in infants and children, and is highly contagious. It is especially dangerous in infants, because the coughing can make it hard for them to eat, drink or breathe.

Whooping cough is a vaccine-preventable disease. Before the vaccine, it was one of the most common childhood diseases and a major cause of childhood deaths in the United States. The number of deaths has since been drastically reduced, from up to 10,000 annually in the 1940s to less than 30 today.

Signs and Symptoms

The early signs of whooping cough mimic the common cold. They include:

- Runny nose
- Low fever

- Sneezing
- Mild, dry hacking cough

After about two weeks, the cough will develop into extended coughing fits, which may include a discoloration of the face, mucus discharge, or vomiting. At this stage the “whooping” sound will also occur. Some people, especially infants, may not cough or whoop, but instead will experience a reddened face and episodes of labored breathing. Whooping cough is most contagious during its earliest stages and can be communicable for up to two weeks, but this window can be shortened with antibiotics.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Usually a diagnosis of whooping cough is confirmed with a throat culture or analysis of nose and/or throat secretions. Antibiotics will be prescribed, and may also be recommended for others living in the same residence as the infected person. Those with whooping cough need to avoid contact with infants so as not to endanger their health. While

waiting out the illness, those infected may want to consider using a vaporizer to ease breathing, and drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.

Prevention

Whooping cough can be completely prevented with the pertussis vaccine, part of the DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, acellular pertussis) immunization. There are five doses that should be administered before a child turns 6. Additional protection is offered for older children in the form of a booster shot called Tdap.



Did You Know...?

Call your doctor if you think your child may have whooping cough even if he or she has been vaccinated against it. Seek immediate medical care for coughing that forces your child to vomit or makes breathing very difficult.