

COUGHING CONCERN

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT HOW TO PROTECT YOUR FAMILY FROM PERTUSSIS

Pertussis, more commonly known as whooping cough, is a highly contagious bacterial disease that can cause death in infants.

In severe cases, people struggle to breathe between coughing spasms because their airways are narrowed which makes taking in oxygen difficult.

Mild cases can go undiagnosed. Because developing a cough is a common symptom, a cough can be mistaken for being associated with a common cold or bronchitis.

Most commonly, babies who are too young to have received the full series of vaccinations get pertussis from a member of their household – which is why members of the entire household and caretakers of infants should get vaccinated.

Other symptoms of disease include difficulty breathing, eating and drinking due to the sticky, thick mucus that builds in the airways. Babies who have a severe case of pertussis may have trouble breathing and turn blue.

People think pertussis only affects young children, when in fact, adults and teenagers are at risk for contracting and spreading the disease, too.

Reports of pertussis cases in Brazoria County have been consistent for the past few years, but outbreaks have been reported in other parts of the region.

Pertussis is spread fairly easily by coming in contact with respiratory droplets from a cough or a sneeze.

Symptoms of the disease usually start about a week after exposure. Most people don't even know they have pertussis during the first phase of the illness because they experience symptoms that are commonly associated with a cold, such as a runny nose, sneezing, occasional coughing and mild fever.

After about a week or two of the mild symptoms, some people experience severe coughing episodes and may have to be hospitalized. Severe coughing episodes can cause vomiting, cracked ribs or even a hernia.

Babies can have such severe coughing that they vomit, lose weight and become weak. If your baby seems to be in distress, seek medical attention promptly.

A vaccine for pertussis is available for adults. Children are given the vaccine as part of their routine immunization schedule. People should be aware, however, that infants are not given their first dose of the vaccine in the four dose primary series until they are 2 months old – making them vulnerable to pertussis until they complete the series at 18 months old.

Getting vaccinated does more than protect your health; it helps protect the health of the children in your family.

You can ask a Brazoria County Health Department nurse about pertussis and find out what you should do to protect your family.