

## **Whooping Cough (Pertussis)**

Winter not only brings colder temperatures and frost on your windshield in the morning, it also brings colds, flu and whooping cough.

Whooping what? Pertussis is commonly called whooping cough. And, although there is no reason for you to be alarmed, it seems a good time to remind you of a few things about it.

Pertussis is a highly contagious bacterial disease spread through droplets from the nose and throat that can be fatal for infants. A simple sneeze or cough, could lead to exposure.

It usually begins with upper respiratory symptoms including runny nose, watery eyes and congestion. There is usually no fever or a low fever. The cough usually begins after the upper respiratory symptoms have appeared. The cough may become progressively worse and may come in explosive bursts resulting in gagging or vomiting after a coughing spell. Usually, people with whooping cough feel fine in between coughing spells.

You need to know that, already, some students in Lexington District One schools have been diagnosed with pertussis, treated with antibiotics and remained at home until their doctors cleared their return. Is that unusual? No. From January 1, 2012 through September 15, 2012, DHEC reports 126 confirmed and another 58 probably cases of Pertussis across South Carolina.

Although all children who attend school in South Carolina are required to receive a series of immunizations before they can begin school including vaccinations against whooping cough (it is the "P" in the DTP, DTP-Hib or DTaP vaccines.), as children get older, the protection against whooping cough provided by the vaccines begins to decrease. That is why adolescents, adults and even older children may develop whooping cough.

Now, I know right there on your medical records it says you received the DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis) when you were a baby. However, that's more than 20 years ago for all of you and much, much longer for some of us.

There is a booster shot available. The booster shot called Tdap is recommended for pre-teens and teens 10–18 years of age, adults 19–64 years of age and healthcare workers. It is especially important for people 10–64 years of age who have contact with an infant such as parents, grandparents, other family members, babysitters and daycare workers. You should get a booster if it has been two years since your last tetanus booster because you work around children.

For more information about pertussis, talk to your health care provider, or go to DHEC's website at <http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/immunization/pertussis.htm>.