Algoma PUBLIC HEALTH
Santé publique Algoma

Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

What is it?

- A very contagious (easy to catch) disease of the respiratory tract, caused by bacteria found in the nose and throat of a person who is infected
- Young infants are at highest risk and have the most serious complications

What are the symptoms?

- Starts with a mild occasional cough which last 1-2 weeks (early stage)
- Progresses to violent coughing spells which can last 1-2 months or longer
- Coughing spells begin very abruptly and often end with vomiting.
- A high pitched whoop sound may be heard with the next breath of air

How quickly do symptoms develop?

- Usually within 9-10 days, can range from 6-20 days after contact

How is it spread?

- It is spread when a person with pertussis coughs or sneezes the germ into the air, where other people can breathe it in

How long is it contagious?

- Very contagious in the early stage and for 3 weeks after coughing spells develop
- No longer contagious after 5 days of treatment; child may return to school or daycare

How is it treated?

- With a prescribed antibiotic medication
- The medication shortens the period of contagiousness but does not stop the cough unless given in the early stage of the disease

What can you do?

- To protect yourself and your child against whooping cough, ensure that all are up to date with pertussis immunization

Whom should I talk to if I have any questions?

Communicable Disease Control, Algoma Public Health at (705) 942-4646, www.algomapublichealth.com, or your health care provider