



Spotlight On Health

What Is Whooping Cough?

Kids of today get a series of shots to protect them from getting whooping cough, but some kids will still get it. Babies who have not had all their series of shots are at risk for whooping cough. This is a very serious illness for a baby, and also affects adults ages 60 and older.

Whooping cough, which is also called pertussis (pur-tus-is) is a bacterial infection of the respiratory system. This includes your lungs and breathing tubes. Whooping cough got its name from kids coughing a lot and in between coughs, they make a “whoop” sound when they try to take a breath.

In 1906, two French scientists discovered the pertussis bacteria and this became the first step to creating a vaccine to prevent this disease. Thousands of children used to get it because it spreads very quickly. Pertussis bacteria can live in the saliva in mouths and in the mucus in noses. It is spread by people coughing or sneezing and releasing tiny droplets in the air that other people breathe in. Colds are caught this way also.

The symptoms of whooping cough are similar to a cold but, unlike the cold, whooping cough sticks around and the cough gets stronger and more severe. If the doctor thinks that a child might have whooping cough, they may take a sample of the mucus in the back of their nose. This can be tested in a lab to see if there’s any bacteria in it. They may also order a chest X-ray and blood tests.

A child who has whooping cough will need to rest, drink plenty of fluids and eat healthy food. Also, the doctor will prescribe antibiotics to help fight the infection from the bacteria. This will guard from spreading the illness to others. Regular check-ups with the doctor will make sure that the breathing and coughing are improving.

Whooping cough can be avoided by getting the pertussis vaccine called the DTaP. The shot prevents two other illnesses — diphtheria and tetanus in addition to pertussis.

Today, kids are usually given five doses of it. The first three shots are given while a child is a baby. Another is given when a child is



a toddler and the fifth one is given between ages 4 to 6. And now, doctors want to give another shot when children are around 11 or 12 to make sure he or she is still protected.

Washing your hands often and staying away from people who have a bad cough may help you avoid getting the disease.