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## **PERTUSSIS (WHOOPING COUGH)**

Pertussis (whooping cough) is an infection of the upper and lower respiratory tract caused by bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. It is easily spread by breathing in droplets from the respiratory tract (following coughing or sneezing) of an infected child or adult. It is most common and severe in infants, but can occur in all ages, particularly in children under age 4 who have not had immunizations ("baby shots"). Adults may not be immune to pertussis and can be infected if they come in contact with a child who has it. Adults can also be carriers (do not have the symptoms but are able to infect others).

### **SYMPTOMS OF PERTUSSIS**

- Cold-like symptoms usually occur first.
- There is little or no fever.
- About the second week of the illness the following symptoms occur:
  - Coughing spells; some children have up to 50 spells a day.
  - The child's skin color may become dusky or blue during the coughing spells.
  - The child will probably cough up mucus after the coughing spell is over.
  - Vomiting is common during and after the coughing spell.
  - Some children may end their coughing spells with a "whoop" sound, although not all children do this.
  - Instead of the "whoop" sound, some children make choking sounds.
- The coughing spells last 2 to 6 weeks, but a cough or "whoop" may occur off and on for a year after a viral respiratory infection.
- Very young children will often have apnea (a pause in breathing) as the major symptom.

### **WHAT YOU WILL SEE**

- Your child will cough many times in a row and appear to be choking, gagging, or not able to catch his breath.
- Your child's face may become red or bluish in color.
- Your child may cough up large amounts of thick stringy mucus.
- Coughing spells may be brought on by eating, drinking, yawning, sneezing, or breathing in cold air. Spells can occur at any time.



**Picture 1** Holding the child in this position will help remove the mucus.

## WHAT YOU SHOULD DO

1. Stay calm. Pertussis is often scary for both the child and the parent.
2. Place your child on his stomach with his face turned to the side and his head slightly lower than his abdomen (Picture 1). This helps the child cough up the mucus without choking on it.
3. Stay with your child during the coughing spell.
4. Keep a bulb syringe ready to remove the mucus that may be coughed up from the throat (Picture 2). Refer to the Helping Hand HH-II-24, *Suctioning the Nose with a Bulb Syringe*.
5. Give your child frequent small amounts of liquids. Clear liquids are usually tolerated better than milk or formulas. Some examples of clear liquids are 7-Up, Pedialyte®, Hi-C, Popsicles, flavored gelatin, and clear broth. Often your child will eat better after coughing and spitting up the mucus.

## WHEN TO CALL THE EMERGENCY SQUAD

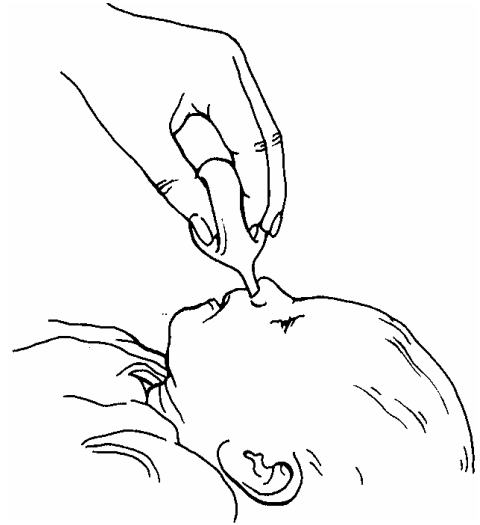
Call your local emergency squad  
(phone) \_\_\_\_\_:

- If your child stops breathing.
- If your child turns blue with coughing spells.

## WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

Call your doctor (phone) \_\_\_\_\_:

- If the coughing spells are lasting longer and happen more often.
- If your child develops a fever.
- If your child has decreased appetite.
- If your child has trouble drinking liquids or keeping fluids down.



**Picture 2** Keep a bulb syringe ready to remove mucus.

## OTHER INFORMATION

- Your child's doctor should prescribe an antibiotic. It is important that you start the medicine immediately and give this medicine for the **prescribed** number of days, even if your child seems better.
- Anyone who has been in direct contact with the child may need to be treated to prevent infection. Your doctor will advise you about this.
- Pertussis can be prevented by immunizing babies with the DTaP vaccine. Your doctor will talk with you about this.

## WHAT TO EXPECT IF YOUR CHILD IS HOSPITALIZED

- The doctor will get a culture from the back of your child's nose and throat. This is done by placing a small cotton-tipped swab into the back of the nose.
- At first, your child will be in Category 2 Isolation. This means you will need to wear a gown and mask during the first 7 days of antibiotic therapy or until the throat culture has been negative for 10 days.
- If your child goes home before the 7 day treatment is over, you will need to keep your child in the house away from other children for a few days.
- Your child may be given extra oxygen to help him breathe easier.
- A heart monitor may be attached to your child because sometimes a child's pulse may lower during a coughing spell.
- Your child will be given an IV if he is vomiting or not taking liquids well by mouth.
- A nurse or nurse assistant will check on your child often.

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse, or call \_\_\_\_\_.