

## Avoiding the “100 Day Cough”

Pertussis, more commonly known as “whooping cough,” is a highly contagious bacterial infection which is characterized by rapid bursts of uncontrolled coughing, followed by a high-pitched “whoop” when gasping for air. Pertussis can be particularly deceptive because initial symptoms mimic those of the common cold, with a runny nose, sneezing, cough, and lingering low-grade fever. Suspicion of a more serious illness may not occur until additional symptoms appear.

The “100 day cough” averages 1 to 6 weeks in length, and can lead to complications in adults including pneumonia, hernia, urinary incontinence, vomiting, or rib fracture. Infants who contract pertussis almost always require hospitalization, as whooping cough in this age group can be fatal.

How contagious is it? The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that one person with pertussis may unknowingly infect up to a dozen others, with 80% of cases transmitted “internally” among household members. Of the 33,000 cases reported in 2014, nearly half were among the children under the age of 10.

Fortunately, pertussis vaccines prove to be 80 to 90 percent effective. Children regularly receive the DTap vaccine during routine pediatric visits, but any adult who comes in contact with children should be vaccinated as well. Although immunities diminish with time, the Tdap vaccine for adults - which can be substituted for the regular tetanus “booster” received every 10 years - can potentially provide immunity for up to 20 years. If a vaccinated person does contract pertussis, the immunities they’ve built will decrease the duration of the illness and reduce the severity of symptoms.

Since the pertussis vaccine is an “inactivated” virus, it will not create side effects that mimic whooping cough. The DTap and Tdap vaccines are typically considered a medical benefit under most primary, private, and Medicare health insurance plans.

It may be “just a cough,” or it may be something much more dangerous and potentially debilitating. Please do not put yourself – or others – at risk for pertussis. Contact your physician, health care provider, or the Farmington Valley VNA at 860-651-3539, for more information on the pertussis vaccine.