Whooping Cough Fact Sheet

What is Whooping Cough?
- Whooping cough, also known as pertussis, is a serious and highly contagious respiratory disease characterized by severe coughing fits. Whooping cough may lead to pneumonia or rib fracture and other complications in adolescents and adults. The cough can last for up to three months or more, and can lead to pneumonia, hospitalization and missed work or school days.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of Whooping Cough?
- Whooping cough starts off like the common cold.
- Early symptoms of whooping cough may include a runny nose, sneezing, occasional cough and low-grade fever. As the disease progresses, a person can experience severe coughing fits. In infants, these coughing fits can make it hard to eat, drink or breathe.
- The whooping sound is usually heard as a person inhales after a coughing fit. This sound is generally heard in infected babies and children, but it is not common in preteens, teens or adults.

How is Whooping Cough Spread?
- Whooping cough is caused by bacteria that are spread when a person with the disease coughs or sneezes.
- Up to 90 percent of non-vaccinated household members may be susceptible to developing the disease when exposed to people infected with whooping cough.

Who is at Risk?
- Protection against whooping cough starts to wear off approximately five to 10 years after completion of childhood vaccination, leaving adolescents and adults susceptible to whooping cough.
- People with whooping cough may not be aware they have it and can spread it to others, including infants and children. Babies who have not received all of their immunizations for whooping cough are especially vulnerable to complications including hospitalization.
  - The disease is most severe in infants six months old or younger. Complications among infants can include pneumonia, seizures and encephalopathy, and can lead to death. Case-fatality rates are approximately one percent in infants younger than two months of age.

Facts and Figures About Whooping Cough
- According to the CDC’s 2007 National Immunization Survey, only 2.1 percent of adults received a Tdap vaccine between 2005 and 2007.
- While more than 3,000 cases of whooping cough were reported in U.S. adults ages 20 years and older in 2008, many more cases may go unreported. In fact, it is estimated by the CDC that over 600,000 cases occur in adults annually.
- On average, adults, preteens and teens with whooping cough miss a week or more of school or work.

How to Prevent Whooping Cough
- Whooping cough vaccinations can help prevent the disease.
- For continued prevention of whooping cough, health experts recommend adolescents get Tdap and adults get a single dose of the Tdap (tetanus toxoid, reduced diphtheria toxoid, acellular pertussis) booster vaccine to replace Td (tetanus and diphtheria toxoids) if they have not been previously vaccinated with Tdap. The Tdap vaccine is a one-time booster shot.
- The CDC recommends whooping cough vaccination to help protect people from the disease. Vaccination can also potentially reduce the number of whooping cough cases, decrease exposure to whooping cough by people at risk for complications (infants) and reduce the overall cost-burden on the U.S. healthcare system.

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