



Pertussis!

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Pertussis also known as whooping cough is making another stir in Ontario this year. It is caused by a bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*.

It is a respiratory disease and highly contagious, but the most serious risk is to infants. Adults remain the source of spread. Not everyone exposed to a sneeze or droplet develops the disease or characteristic whoop type cough. Most of us are immune, which we acquired by the first series of vaccination programs in the province, and others got immunity by being exposed to it in the past. Pertussis begins as a mild cough, sore throat and feeling run down, similar to a 100 other things. The difference is becomes obvious in a couple of weeks when the severity of cough increases, and it becomes almost violent followed by a high pitched whoop as you struggle to breath air in. Infants often vomit afterwards. A special testing swab is taken to confirm the diagnosis. The disease is treatable and responds to antibiotics, when given early. The natural course is for the cough to slowly dissolve and full recovery takes place. Babies with other problems can struggle and succumb to this illness.

We rarely saw this disease in Ontario over the last few decades. The main reason is that Pertussis is one of the first vaccines we administer to newborns. It is given in several doses over time to ensure immunity. New concerns have emerged as over 240 new cases of the disease have been reported in Southern Ontario. The exact cause is not certain. Some have suggested that the vaccine has failed, yet others suggest that not enough Adults are immune and continue to spread it. For the later reason, Ontario has expanded its vaccination program to include Pertussis vaccine into the Tetanus vaccine. Essentially, when you receive a tetanus booster in Ontario, you now are getting immunity to Diptheria, Pertussis and Tetanus which is a very good thing and should be encouraged. If you never remember getting a tetanus booster as a teenager or cannot remember getting a Tetanus shot in the last 10 -15 years, it is available at your local doctors office.