

Vaccine-Preventable Diseases in Adults
Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

How does pertussis impact adults?

Pertussis is a **highly contagious respiratory infection** that often resembles a mild upper respiratory infection early on, which can delay diagnosis.[1,2]

Pertussis typically has three stages: **an early catarrhal phase (1–2 weeks)** with mild cold-like symptoms; **a paroxysmal phase (1–6 weeks, sometimes up to 10)** with severe coughing fits and "whoop"; and a **recovery phase (~2–3 weeks)** with gradual improvement but possible recurrent cough.[2,3]

The patient can experience numerous, rapid coughs due to difficulty expelling thick mucus. During such coughing attacks, the patient may become cyanotic.[4]

- Complications for the patient include pneumonia, passing out, and rib fractures

Reported pertussis cases have recently increased; in 2024, **more than 35,000 cases were reported** in the United States, **approximately five times the number reported in 2023 (7,063)**.[5,6]

Who should receive the Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis) vaccine?[7-9]

All adults who have never received Tdap should receive **one dose of Tdap**, regardless of the interval since the last Td vaccine

After a single Tdap dose, continue **Td or Tdap every 10 years** for routine booster protection against tetanus and diphtheria

For pregnant patients, administer **one dose of Tdap during every pregnancy**, optimally at **27–36 weeks' gestation**. If Tdap was not given during current or previous pregnancies and the mother has never received Tdap, administer **one dose in the immediate postpartum period**[7-9]

Tdap may be administered with other indicated adult vaccines during the same visit[9]

Follow the CDC-recommended immunization schedule to ensure that your patients get the pertussis vaccines they need

CDC=Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

References: 1. Whooping cough (pertussis): About whooping cough. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed November 26, 2025. Accessed December 17, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/index.html **2.** Whooping cough (pertussis): Symptoms of whooping cough. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed December 2, 2025. Accessed December 17, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/signs-symptoms/index.html **3.** Epidemiology and prevention of vaccine-preventable diseases: Chapter 16: Pertussis. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed April 12, 2024. Accessed November 18, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/pinkbook/hcp/table-of-contents/chapter-16-pertussis.html **4.** Whooping cough (pertussis): Clinical features of pertussis. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed December 1, 2025. Accessed December 17, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/hcp/clinical-signs/index.html **5.** 2024 Provisional Pertussis Surveillance Report. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Updated January 2025. Accessed November 18, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/media/pdfs/2025/01/pertuss-surv-report-2024_PROVISIONAL-508.pdf **6.** Pertussis surveillance and trends. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed December 2, 2025. Accessed December 17, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/php/surveillance/index.html **7.** Whooping cough (pertussis): Vaccinating pregnant patients. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed December 2, 2025. Accessed December 17, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/hcp/vaccine-recommendations/vaccinating-pregnant-patients.html **8.** Whooping cough (pertussis): Pertussis vaccination recommendations. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed December 2, 2025. Accessed December 17, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/hcp/vaccine-recommendations/index.html **9.** Administering diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis vaccines. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Reviewed September 6, 2022. Accessed November 18, 2025. https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/dtap-tdap-td/hcp/administering-vaccine.html

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