

## EXPOSURE TO PERTUSSIS

- **What is pertussis and how is it spread?**

Pertussis is a bacterial infection of the respiratory tract which generally begins with mild upper respiratory symptoms and can progress to severe attacks of coughing (paroxysmal stage), often with a characteristic inspiratory whoop. It is caused by Bordetella pertussis. Transmission occurs by close contact with respiratory secretions from an infected person.

- **What is considered to be an exposure to pertussis?**

A person is considered to be exposed if there is inhalation of droplets and discharges from the respiratory tract of an infected person. Persons who wore a mask for all contacts with the patient are not exposed. Patients are most contagious during the early stage of the disease, before the onset of the cough.

- **What should I do if I am exposed?**

If you are exposed to someone with pertussis, you should be evaluated to see if chemoprophylaxis would be right for you.

- **What is chemoprophylaxis?**

Chemoprophylaxis is antibiotic therapy given to prevent infection and secondary spread of the disease. Chemoprophylaxis should be given as soon as possible after exposure, preferably within 24 hours. It is recommended for household and other close contacts. There are several options for adults with Pertussis exposures: antibiotics will be chosen based on the exposed person's medical history and the current CDC guidelines.

- **What is the incubation period?**

The incubation period (the time between exposure to infection and the appearance of the first symptom) is 6-20 days, usually 7-10 days.

- **What if I decide not to take chemoprophylaxis?**

Chemoprophylaxis is optional, but if you develop a runny nose, nasal congestion, sore throat, or cough within two weeks of the exposure, you should see a health care provider. Prompt initiation of antibiotic therapy decreases infectivity and may shorten the course of the illness.

- **What if my exposure occurs at work?**

In the event of an exposure within the Medical Center, Infection Control will notify the VOHC (Vanderbilt Occupational Health Clinic, Room 640 Medical Arts Building, phone 936-0955) of the faculty/staff members who have been exposed. The VOHC will then contact the faculty/staff members to discuss chemoprophylaxis. Your manager will need to complete a Tennessee First Report of Work Injury and forward this to the Office of Risk Management (Room 610 Oxford House, phone 936-0660). You should keep your receipts for any medical treatment that you receive as a result of this exposure and submit them to Risk Management for possible reimbursement.