PERTUSSIS

WHAT IS IT?

Pertussis is a highly contagious infection of the lower respiratory tract caused by the bacterium Bordetella pertussis. Pertussis is a slowly progressing disease (several weeks) that is particularly severe among young infants.

SYMPTOMS

• Typical pertussis is characterized by a persistent cough (over three weeks) in most cases in the absence of fever. Paroxysmal cough is associated with the typical inspiratory whoop, apnea, cyanosis or post-tussive vomiting.
• The disease may be particularly severe and even fatal in infants.
• Adolescents and adults usually present atypical forms of the disease associated with a persistent cough.

EPIDEMIOLOGY AND VACCINATION

• Pertussis is a strictly human disease. It is easily transmitted by close contact, mainly through coughing.
• Since the 1920s, the incidence of pertussis has decreased by more than 90% in countries that have introduced vaccination (19-20). Unfortunately, the disease still raises concern due to the increase in the proportion of cases occurring in infants too young to be vaccinated and in adolescents and adults in whom the protection provided by the disease or vaccination during their childhood is waning. The latter group may serve as a reservoir for the transmission to young infants.
• Vaccination against pertussis is included in the routine vaccination of infants and children from 2 months to 6 years of age.
• The availability of acellular pertussis vaccines now allows the administration of boosters for adolescents and adults.

References :

19 - Pertussis vaccines. WHO position paper; WER 2005; 80:29-40;
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