What college students need to know about
Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Q. What is pertussis?
A. Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a highly contagious respiratory disease that's known for uncontrollable, violent coughing, which often makes it hard to breathe.

For most adults, the illness is disruptive and uncomfortable, but not life-threatening. However, pertussis can quickly become severe and pose life-threatening complications in infants and toddlers. Pertussis vaccines are recommended for children, teens, and adults, including college students.

Q. What are the symptoms of pertussis?
A. In adults, initial pertussis symptoms develop between seven and 20 days after exposure and are similar to the common cold—runny nose and low fever (less than 102°F). After about 10 days, persistent and violent coughing fits develop. Serious complications in adults are very rare. Minor coughs that do not interfere with sleeping or activities are most likely due to a viral upper respiratory infection and would not be an indication of pertussis.

Q. How is pertussis spread?
A. People with pertussis usually spread the disease by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the pertussis bacteria. Many infants who get pertussis are infected by parents, older siblings, or other caregivers who might not even know they have the disease.

Q. Who is at risk?
A. Everyone is potentially at risk for pertussis, including:
   • Adults and teens whose childhood vaccines have worn off and haven't received the Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) booster vaccine.
   • Infants and children who haven't received the DTaP vaccine or aren't fully vaccinated (haven't had all five doses).

Q. How can pertussis be prevented?
A. The best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated. Also, keeping away from anyone who has cold symptoms or who is coughing can help protect you.

Q. How is pertussis treated?
A. Pertussis can be treated with antibiotics and early treatment is very important. Treatment may make your infection less severe only if it is started early, before coughing fits begin. Treatment will help prevent spreading the disease to others and is necessary for stopping the spread of pertussis.

Even if you are treated, it is likely that coughing will continue for up to six weeks. Treatment after three weeks of illness is unlikely to help because the bacteria are gone from your body, even though you usually will still have symptoms.

Anyone treated for pertussis should be isolated from school, work, or similar activities until they have completed at least the first five days of an appropriate antibiotic therapy.

Q. Who should get vaccinated?
A. Adults ages 19 and older who didn't get Tdap vaccine as a preteen or teen should get one dose of Tdap. Getting vaccinated with Tdap at least two weeks before coming into close contact with an infant is especially important for families with and caregivers of new infants.

Q. Where can I get vaccinated?
A. The vaccine is available at UHS for a fee. If you’re enrolled in the Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP), the vaccine is fully covered.

Students can call (608) 265-5600 to schedule an appointment.

The vaccine is also available from your family health care provider.

Q. What if I think I might have pertussis?
A. If you are experiencing pertussis symptoms, make an appointment at UHS by calling 608-265-5600 or online through MyUHS. Urgent medical advice is available 24 hours a day by calling 608-265-5600 (option 1).

Q. Where can I find more information?
A. Learn more about pertussis and the vaccine at http://www.cdc.gov/Features/Pertussis/
If you are currently being treated for pertussis

Anyone treated for pertussis infection should be isolated from school, work or similar activities until they have completed at least the first five days of antibiotics.

- Don't attend class or labs, go to work, or socialize with others during this five day period.
- Don't use public transportation.
- Do wear a mask in public or when around other people. Masks are available for purchase at retail pharmacies.
- Do follow the schedule for taking antibiotics exactly as your doctor prescribed.

**Note:** Treatment is also recommended for people who are close contacts (roommates, family members, intimate partners) of a case to prevent or reduce the severity of illness. If any of these people are UW-Madison students, you can refer them to UHS. Casual contacts do not need treatment.

Remember, even if you are treated and taking antibiotics, it is likely that coughing will continue for up to six weeks.

Try these tips to help manage your symptoms:

- Get lots of rest!
- Drink plenty of fluids—water, juice and soups are good choices.
- Use a mist vaporizer to help soothe irritated lungs and to help loosen respiratory secretions. You can also try a hot bath or shower.
- Cough medicines will most likely be ineffective.
- Call UHS (608-265-5600) or your health care provider if you develop breathing difficulties or a fever greater than 100°F.

Reduce the risk of spreading pertussis

- Cover your cough. Cough into your sleeve, not your hands.
- Wash your hands often.
- Avoid being near babies and young children until you have been on antibiotics for five days. If you work with young children or babies, do not return to work until you have been on antibiotics for five days.
- Make sure the other people in your home get the pertussis vaccine if they haven’t had it.