



Department of  
Family Medicine

## **WHOOPING COUGH**

**March 2016**

Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington Public Health has confirmed that pertussis (whooping cough) has been diagnosed in the Kingston area. Whooping cough is a very serious contagious illness. It is spread through the air by breathing, coughing, sneezing or talking. Persons infected with whooping cough can spread the germ for 21 days after they begin to feel sick.

### **What are the most common symptoms of whooping cough?**

Whooping cough usually begins with a runny nose, watery eyes and a cough. After one to two weeks, the cough becomes severe and sometimes causes gagging, choking, vomiting or difficulty breathing. Following the cough, a “whoop” sound is sometimes heard. The coughing spells can make it difficult to eat, drink or sleep. Babies can gasp for breath and turn blue from a lack of air. Coughing fits can last up to 10 weeks.

### **Who is most at risk?**

Babies and pregnant women are most at risk. Half the babies who get sick with whooping cough will have to be hospitalized. One-quarter of them will have pneumonia. On rare occasions, babies can suffer from seizures or brain damage as a result of becoming sick with whooping cough.

### **How can you protect yourself and your family from whooping cough?**

**Adults** 18 years of age or older who have not been vaccinated against whooping cough should receive one dose of the vaccine to help protect young children who are not yet fully vaccinated. Immunization of adults in a baby's/child's family (parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) can reduce the chance the child will become sick with whooping cough.

**Teens** between the age of 14 and 16 years should receive their regular dose of the vaccine.

**Children** between the ages of four and six years should get their regular dose.

**Babies and toddlers** should be given all their shots according to the regular vaccine schedule; the shots are given at two months, four months, six months and 18 months.

If you have any questions about whooping cough or about the vaccine, consult your health-care provider or KFL&A Public Health at 613-549-1232.

**Please help your health-care provider keep you and your family safe. Get your shots!**