Pertussis—whooping cough—is highly contagious and easiest to treat when caught early. Vaccination is protection, but vaccinated children can still catch pertussis in a mild form and pass it on to others.

Whooping cough starts as a runny nose without a cough. This stage lasts about one week. If your child has a runny nose and you know he or she was possibly exposed to pertussis, call your doctor.

The cough starts slowly and builds into the harsh hack that earned it the name whooping cough. For babies younger than 1, whooping cough can be very serious.

People with pertussis are contagious for up to three weeks. Doctor-prescribed antibiotics can kill the infection and keep it from spreading. Children diagnosed with pertussis need to stay home from school until they have completed five days of antibiotic treatment.

The pertussis vaccination is available at the Panhandle Health District. Call 415-5270 for an appointment.