

HEALTH ALERT NETWORK | HEALTH ADVISORY | November 14, 2023

North Dakota Experiencing an Increase in Pertussis Cases

Due to eight confirmed or probable pertussis cases reported since November 2nd in the eastern part of the state, the North Dakota Department of Health and Human Services (ND HHS) is reminding healthcare providers to suspect pertussis when evaluating patients. Patients with pertussis present with prolonged coughs or coughs accompanied by paroxysms, post-tussive vomiting, inspiratory whoop or apnea (in infants younger than 12 months). If pertussis is suspected, the patient should be [treated appropriately](#) and excluded from school/childcare and other group activities until five days after the start of recommended antimicrobial treatment. **Providers should not wait for laboratory results to treat**, and suspected pertussis cases must be reported immediately to the ND HHS at 701-328-2378.

Pertussis (known as whooping cough) is a contagious disease that lasts for many weeks or months and can cause severe coughing with a “whooping” sound or coughing that leads to vomiting. The disease can be life threatening for infants. Generally, the illness is less severe in those who are vaccinated and may present as just a prolonged cough.

The clinical criteria for pertussis is a cough lasting at least two weeks with at least one of the following symptoms:

- Paroxysms (uncontrollable bursts) of coughing
- Inspiratory whoop
- Post-tussive vomiting
- Apnea (in infants < 12 months)

Testing:

The ND HHS recommends providers collect a nasopharyngeal swab for molecular testing from all persons with suspected pertussis.

- If possible, the nasopharyngeal swab, in viral transport media, should be collected within three weeks of cough onset.
- Specimens should be collected using a sterile Dacron® swab placed in universal transport media.
- Samples should be received refrigerated within 4 days of collection.

- Pertussis testing kits are available at most major medical centers or providers may obtain them from the ND HHS Laboratory Services by ordering on the website at [Laboratory Services | Health and Human Services North Dakota](#) or by calling 701-328-6272.
- The fee for pertussis testing through the ND HHS is \$60.
- Serological testing for pertussis is not confirmatory and is not recommended.

Patient Management:

The ND HHS recommends that people suspected of having pertussis be treated and excluded from community activities, including school, extracurricular activities, childcare, or work, until five days of antibiotics have been completed. Do not wait for laboratory testing results to treat and report the suspected case to the ND HHS immediately. Only the antibiotics listed on the [Pertussis Treatment and Chemoprophylaxis Guidelines](#) are effective in treating pertussis. Cases that have been coughing longer than 21 days do not need to be treated with antibiotics.

Individuals at high risk for serious complications from pertussis include infants, pregnant people, unvaccinated and under-vaccinated individuals, and those with a compromised immune system.

Exposure in Health Care Settings:

Prevention of pertussis in health care settings is crucial to avoid the spread of disease to medically vulnerable individuals. ND HHS recommends:

- Health care personnel should be [appropriately vaccinated](#) against pertussis.
- Patients with known or suspected pertussis should be placed in [droplet precautions](#).
- Potentially infectious health care personnel should be excluded from work.
- Health care personnel who are exposed should be identified during case investigation and should monitor for symptoms for 21 days after exposure.
- Exposed health care personnel who are high-risk or work with high-risk populations should be offered appropriate antibiotic prophylaxis.

Contacts:

All household contacts of confirmed pertussis cases, regardless of symptoms, should be placed on the appropriate antibiotics. The ND HHS will determine if any other contacts need to receive prophylaxis and will refer them to their primary care provider for evaluation and treatment.

The incubation period for pertussis is usually seven to 10 days but can range from four to 21 days. Symptomatic contacts to confirmed cases should be treated, reported to the ND HHS, and advised to exclude themselves from all activities until five days after the start of effective antimicrobial treatment or 21 days of cough have passed.

Pertussis Immunization:

The pertussis vaccine is the best available protection against the disease. It helps protect both the person who gets the vaccine and those around them who are most vulnerable to severe whooping cough or complications (like babies and pregnant women).

Protection received from any of the available pertussis vaccines is [73 to 98 percent effective](#) in the first year after receiving the vaccine, but wanes over time. In the same way, people that had whooping cough in the past gradually become susceptible to the disease in about five to ten years.

Diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis vaccine (DTaP) should be administered routinely to infants at 2, 4, 6 and 15 to 18 months of age. A booster dose of DTaP should be given at 4 to 6 years of age. DTaP vaccine should not be given to children seven years of age and older.

Tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis vaccine (Tdap) should be administered to the following:

- Adolescents at 11 to 12 years of age
- Adolescents who did not receive Tdap at 11 to 12 years of age or for those ages 7 to 10 years who are incompletely vaccinated
- A single dose of Tdap should replace a Td booster (recommended every 10 years) for all adults not previously vaccinated with Tdap, including adults 65 years of age and older.
- Health-care workers
- Pregnant women during the third trimester (preferably at 27-32 weeks gestation) regardless of last Tdap or Td
- People in contact with infants (parents, grandparents, caregivers, child-care providers, etc.)

The ND HHS supplies DTaP, DTaP-containing and Tdap vaccines for all Vaccines For Children (VFC) eligible children (18 and younger and either Medicaid eligible, American Indian, uninsured or underinsured). Tdap may also be ordered for uninsured and underinsured adults. Please refer to the ND HHS Immunization Unit [website](#) for additional information regarding pertussis.

Please contact the ND HHS Immunization Unit at 701.328.2378 or toll-free at 800.472.2180 with any questions or concerns regarding this issue.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

- *Health Alert conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.*
- *Health Advisory provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.*
- *Health Update provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.*
- *Health Information provides general information that is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.*

This message is being sent to local public health units, clinics, hospitals, physicians, tribal health, North Dakota Nurses Association, North Dakota Long Term Care Association, North Dakota Healthcare Association, North Dakota Medical Association, and hospital public information officers.