



Centre for Disease Control

NT HEALTH

Public Health Alert

Issued: 24th June 2024
Issued by: NT Centre for Disease Control
Issued to: Health Practitioners

Increase in Pertussis (Whooping cough)

Summary

- Increased numbers of pertussis disease are occurring in the NT and across Australia.
- Early diagnosis, isolation and antibiotics can reduce further transmission and protect vulnerable infants.
- Test for *Bordetella pertussis* PCR on a nasopharyngeal (preferred) or throat swab.
- Vaccination remains key to protecting the community.

Current situation

- National pertussis notifications continue to increase in 2024 with the highest proportion of notifications in school-aged children and young adults (aged 10-19 years).
- NT has seen an increase in cases since June 2024 and more cases are expected.
- The risk of hospitalisations from pertussis infection is highest in infants under 3 months of age.
- Decreased vaccination coverage, waning immunity and lower case numbers during the COVID-19 pandemic has made risk of spread high.

Testing

- Patients with a cough illness lasting 14 days or more without an apparent cause plus one of the following: (a) paroxysms of coughing; (b) inspiratory 'whoop'; (c) post-tussive vomiting should be tested.
- Test for *Bordetella pertussis* PCR on a nasopharyngeal (preferred) or throat swab.
Serology is not recommended to detect early infection.

Treatment

- Early treatment with antibiotics stops transmission and may reduce the duration of symptoms.
- For recommended treatment please see the latest edition of *Therapeutic Guidelines: Antibiotic*.

Vaccination

- Vaccination remains the most effective means of preventing pertussis and spread to vulnerable people such as babies and pregnant women.

- All pregnant women from 20 weeks should be vaccinated to protect infants from birth with passive antibodies until they can receive their own vaccination at 6 weeks.
- Vaccines given in pregnancy offer neonates 90% protection against confirmed disease and 97% against death in infants under 3 months of age prior to their first vaccinations.
- Ensure infants and children are vaccinated on time as per NT immunisation schedule.
- Health care workers should receive a pertussis containing vaccine every 10 years.
- See Australian Immunisation handbook [Pertussis \(whooping cough\) | The Australian Immunisation Handbook \(health.gov.au\)](#).

Preventing Spread

- People diagnosed with pertussis are no longer infectious (even if the PCR result is still positive) from:
 - 21 days after the onset of any cough, or
 - 14 days after onset of paroxysmal cough (if the onset is known), or
 - when they have completed 5 days of a course of an appropriate antibiotic
- Ask your patient not to attend school, childcare or any place with infants or pregnant women until they have completed at least 5 days of antibiotics or it is 21 days after the onset of their cough.

Further information

- [Whooping cough \(pertussis\) | NT Health](#)
- Contact the NT CDC for any questions

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