



Centre for Disease Control

NT HEALTH

Public Health Alert

Issued: 2 October 2024
Issued by: NT Centre for Disease Control
Issued to: Health Practitioners

Increase in Pertussis

Summary

- Increased pertussis cases are occurring across Australia especially in school-aged children in New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria.
- NT has seen increasing pertussis numbers since June 2024, which is likely to continue.
- Early diagnosis, isolation and antibiotics can reduce further transmission and protect vulnerable infants.
- *Bordetella pertussis* PCR on a nasopharyngeal (preferred) or throat swab is the best test. Serology (IgA) is not useful to detect early infection and only recommended after a cough of 4 weeks duration.
- Vaccination remains key to protecting the community. Ensure infants and children are vaccinated on time at 6 weeks, 4 months, 6 months, 18 months and 4 years. And for adolescents vaccinate from 12 years (Year 7) with catch up until 19 years. NIP funded.
- All pregnant women need to be vaccinated from 20 weeks in each and every pregnancy to provide protection against pertussis for infants from birth.
- Health care workers should receive pertussis containing vaccine every 10 years.

Current situation

- National pertussis notifications continue to increase in 2024, with the highest number of cases reported in any year to date. The increase is driven by New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria with the highest proportion of notifications in school-aged children (aged 5-14 years). The current situation may be due to several factors such as decreased vaccination coverage, waning immunity and overall population having reduced exposure to pertussis in recent years.
- NT has seen an increase in cases since June 2024 and this is likely to continue as per national trends.

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.
- *Bordetella pertussis* PCR on a nasopharyngeal (preferred) or throat swab. Pertussis PCR may be included in respiratory multiplex PCR panels.
- Serology is not recommended for detecting infection unless the presentation is delayed until after 4 weeks from any cough onset.

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.
- Rates of all vaccinations have dropped in the NT over recent years and the risk of hospitalisations from pertussis infection is highest in infants under 3 months of age.
- All pregnant women need to be vaccinated from 20 weeks in each and every pregnancy (funded) to protect infants from birth with passive antibodies until the infant 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.
- Vaccination against pertussis are part of the routine childhood immunisation schedule (at 6 weeks, 4 months, 6 months, 18 months, 4 years and 12 years).
- Health care workers should receive pertussis containing vaccine every 10 years.
- All people caring for young children are encouraged to be vaccinated every 10 years e.g. family members, childcare and any others who wish to be vaccinated. Privately funded vaccine is available from GP's or Pharmacies who offer vaccination services
- See Australian Immunisation handbook [Pertussis \(whooping cough\) | The Australian Immunisation Handbook \(health.gov.au\)](https://www.health.gov.au/immunisation-handbook).

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

Scan QR Code for more on Public Health Alerts



Darwin
Tennant Creek

(08) 8922 8044
(08) 8932 4259

Katherine
Alice Springs

(08) 8973 9041
(08) 8951 7540

Nhulunbuy (08) 8987 0357

Issued by: Vicki Krause, Director, Centre for Disease Control, Public Health Division, NT Health

Centre for Disease Control
Public Health Division

(08) 8922 8044 or 1800 008 002
CDCSurveillance.DARWIN@nt.gov.au