

**MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH  
COMMUNICABLE DISEASE BULLETIN**

**Date:** Thursday, July 18, 2024

**Distribution:** Primary Health Care, Department of Family Practice, NSH; Emergency Departments; Provincial Public Health Lab Network; Dr. Nicole Boutilier, Executive Vice President, Medicine and Clinical Operations, NSH; 811

**RE:** Confirmed case of pertussis in Northern/Central Zone

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Public Health is investigating a confirmed case of pertussis (whooping cough) in an individual in Northern Zone who attended school in Central Zone during their infectious period. We have notified the school community of the potential exposure. All close contacts have been identified.

**Given the diagnosis and potential for transmission above, as well as ongoing reports of increased case activity in various parts of Canada and internationally, healthcare providers may receive an increase in questions or visits to clinics and emergency departments relating to pertussis. Please keep pertussis on your differential when seeing patients with cough from this area.**

Pertussis is easily transmitted from person to person via inhalation of respiratory droplets or direct contact with an infected person and cases can remain infectious for three weeks after their cough onset. The risk of severe disease is highest in very young children, particularly infants who are too young to have completed their primary vaccine series. Immunization and early detection and treatment of infection are measures that can assist with preventing ongoing transmission of pertussis to vulnerable populations.

Due to the non-specific nature of the early illness, pertussis often goes under-diagnosed. Health care providers should consider pertussis in patients presenting with clinically compatible signs or symptoms, including the initial stage characterized by rhinorrhea, sneezing, low-grade fever, and a mild cough. After 1 to 2 weeks of a gradually worsening cough, the paroxysmal stage begins, characterized by bursts of rapid coughing, ending with an inspiratory whoop and sometimes post-tussive vomiting. The clinical presentation varies with age, in young infants, clinical symptoms can be atypical, the whoop and post-tussive vomiting may be absent, and the presentation may be solely episodes of apnea. In adolescents and adults pertussis can be an unrecognized cause of prolonged cough.

Diagnostic testing for pertussis consists of a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab for polymerase chain reaction (PCR), preferably before initiating antibiotic therapy. The NP swab can be collected by a provider and dropped off or delivered to your local lab, where possible, or sent to the IWK for processing.

Pertussis is a notifiable disease in Nova Scotia, in accordance with [It's the Law: Reporting Notifiable Diseases and Conditions](#). Public Health conducts follow-up when a case of pertussis is identified, including contact tracing to protect high risk infants.

**Please contact Public Health if you see a patient who you suspect may have pertussis.**

**Immunization reminders:**

- Ensure your patients (especially those 0-4 years of age) are up to date with their Tetanus, Diphtheria, Pertussis (Tdap) immunization. In Nova Scotia, children are recommended to receive a pertussis-containing vaccine at 2, 4, 6, and 18 months of age and at 4-6 years of age (pre-school).
- An adolescent dose is recommended and administered through the grade 7 School Immunization Program.
- In adulthood, all pregnant women, in every pregnancy at 26 weeks or after, irrespective of their immunization history, are recommended to receive pertussis-containing vaccine, to provide protection to themselves and their young infant through antibody transfer in-utero.
- Family members of pregnant people should also be up to date with their pertussis immunization.
- For other adults, one dose of a pertussis-containing vaccine is recommended.

Additional immunization eligibility information can be found at:

[https://novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/documents/Nova\\_Scotia\\_Vaccine\\_Immunoglobulin\\_eligibility.pdf](https://novascotia.ca/dhw/cdpc/documents/Nova_Scotia_Vaccine_Immunoglobulin_eligibility.pdf)

The Nova Scotia Routine Immunization Schedules for Children, Youth & Adults can be found here:

<https://novascotia.ca/DHW/CDPC/documents/Routine-Immunization-Schedules-for-Children-Youth-Adults.pdf>

If you require further information, please contact your [local Public Health office](#).

Sincerely,



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