

HALTON REGION PUBLIC HEALTH • Office of the Medical Officer of Health

TEL: 905-825-6000 • TOLL FREE: 1-866-442-5866 • FAX: 905-825-1444

TO: Halton Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Emergency Departments, other Healthcare Providers

FROM: Dr. Joanna Oda, Associate Medical Officer of Health

DATE: June 25, 2024

RE: Pertussis (whooping cough) circulating in Halton

---

## QUICK FACTS

- There has been an increased number of pertussis outbreaks occurring globally. In Ontario, there have been 70 cases of pertussis between January and March 2024, compared to a total of 289 confirmed cases in 2023.
- Since the start of the year Halton Region Public Health has investigated 5 confirmed cases. However, did not have any confirmed cases of pertussis from 2021-2023.
- To facilitate timely testing, ensure *Bordetella* (pertussis) Nasopharyngeal swabs are readily available.
- All suspected and confirmed cases of pertussis should be reported **immediately** to Halton Region Public Health at 905-825-6000 (or toll-free at 1-866-442-5866) or dial 311 if calling within Halton Region.
- Ensure that your patients are up-to-date on their immunizations to protect against pertussis; children and adolescents may have missed their routine shots due to disruptions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## KEY MESSAGES FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

- Pertussis is an acute respiratory infection caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*. Symptoms appear in three stages:
  - **First (catarrhal) stage:** lasts for one to two weeks, the symptoms are similar to the common cold: low grade fever, runny nose, nasal congestion, sneezing, red and watery eyes, cough
  - **Second (paroxysmal) stage:** lasts one to two months or longer, symptoms include coughing spells that end in a high-pitched whoop and/or vomiting, shortness of breath or exhaustion from coughing
  - **Final (convalescent) stage:** lasts weeks to months, the coughing spells gradually occur less often and become less severe.
- Consider pertussis in the differential diagnoses, particularly in individuals with coughing spells that end in a high-pitched whoop or vomiting, shortness of breath or exhaustion from coughing.
- **Diagnostic Testing**
  - Offer the patient a medical mask, and promptly bring into an examination room. The risk of transmission increases significantly if spending more than an hour in a confined space with others. For comprehensive guidance on droplet and contact precautions, including best practices for the prevention of transmission of acute respiratory infections, refer to [Annex B: Best Practices for Prevention of Transmission of Acute Respiratory Infection In All Health Care Settings \(PIDAC\)](#)
  - Testing is best done within 3 weeks of cough onset AND prior to antibiotic therapy, using the ***Bordetella* Nasopharyngeal swab PCR**. Follow the instructions found in [Bordetella Pertussis Kit](#) as it is **the only acceptable transport medium for pertussis**.
    - Testing following antibiotic therapy or as a test of cure is NOT recommended as the result may remain positive for some time following treatment and after cough symptoms resolve. Cases are no longer communicable after 5 days of effective antibiotics
  - Refer to [Bordetella - Respiratory - PCR | Public Health Ontario](#) for testing details

- To order appropriate specimen collection supplies, use the Public Health Ontario Laboratory (PHOL) [Requisition for Specimen Containers and Supplies](#). See [PHOL Kit and Test Ordering Instructions](#) for more information.
- **Chemoprophylaxis for Contacts**
  - Macrolide antibiotics, such as azithromycin and erythromycin, may prevent or moderate clinical pertussis when given during the incubation period or early in the first stage.
  - There is no evidence that antibiotic chemoprophylaxis of contacts changes the epidemic course of pertussis in the community, therefore, it is only recommended for the following contacts of confirmed pertussis cases:
    - household contacts (including attendees at home childcare settings) where there is a vulnerable person defined as an infant < 1 year of age [immunized or not] or a pregnant woman in the third trimester; and
    - for out of household exposures, vulnerable persons, defined as infants less than one year of age regardless of immunization status and pregnant women in their third trimester who have had face-to-face exposure and/or have shared confined air for > 1 hour.
- **Pertussis Immunization**
  - Routine pertussis immunization of infants, children and adolescents: DTaP-IPV-Hib vaccine should be provided at 2, 4, 6 and 18 months of age, followed by a booster dose of Tdap-IPV vaccine at 4 years of age (school entry) and a booster dose of Tdap vaccine at 14 years of age.
  - Routine pertussis immunization of adults: one dose of Tdap vaccine should be provided to all adults 24 years of age and older. If this dose is missed, it can be given at any time to replace a Td booster (given every 10 years in adulthood).
  - One dose of Tdap vaccine should be administered in every pregnancy, ideally between 27 and 32 weeks of gestation.
  - Ensure patients are up to date with pertussis vaccination and that patients have reported their vaccinations to Public Health.
  - As mentioned in past communications, Pediacel will be transitioning to Pentacel, likely in July. Both vaccines are equivalent and interchangeable DTaP-IPV-Hib vaccines.

## KEY MESSAGES FOR PATIENTS

- The best way to prevent pertussis and many other vaccine preventable diseases is by staying up-to-date on all immunizations, especially prior to any travel.
- Report any pertussis vaccination received to your local Public Health unit ([halton.ca/immunize](http://halton.ca/immunize)).
- Pertussis vaccination is required for school attendance in Ontario.
- Information about vaccination is available on the Halton Region website at [Halton - Immunization Information for Families](#)

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. [Testing Indications for Pertussis](#), Public Health Ontario, March 11, 2024
2. [Publicly Funded Immunization Schedules for Ontario June 2022](#)
3. [Pertussis Vaccines: Canadian Immunization Guide](#)
4. [Updates on Vaccine Products and Packing Changes](#), Halton Region, June 19, 2024

Please report all suspected/confirmed cases of [Diseases of Public Health Significance](#) to Public Health immediately by calling 311, 905-825-6000 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866.

PLEASE POST IN EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS AND PHYSICIAN LOUNGES

IF YOU CAN'T ACCESS HYPERLINKS, PLEASE SIGN UP FOR ELECTRONIC UPDATES BY EMAILING [DOCTORS@HALTON.CA](mailto:DOCTORS@HALTON.CA)