

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

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

FROM: Dr. Patrick Galange, Associate Medical Officer of Health

DATE: September 10, 2024

RE: Pertussis Update – Ontario continues to see a rise in rates of pertussis

QUICK FACTS

- As we begin the new school year, please ensure your patients are up-to-date with their routine vaccinations, including pertussis, as per [Ontario's routine immunization schedule](#).
- In Ontario, there have been 431 cases of pertussis between January and July 2024, up from 333 in all of 2023. The majority of cases were among children.
- Since the start of the year, Halton Region Public Health has investigated 20 cases of pertussis. This is likely an underestimate as pertussis is underdiagnosed and underreported in Ontario, and is a common and often unrecognized cause of persistent cough in adolescents and adults.
- Consider pertussis in your **differential diagnosis**, particularly in individuals with coughing spells that end in a high-pitched whoop or vomiting, shortness of breath or exhaustion from coughing, or with a **cough lasting two weeks or longer**.
- To facilitate timely testing, ensure Bordetella Nasopharyngeal swabs are readily available. See Diagnostic Testing section below for details on ordering the appropriate swabs and further testing details.
- **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.**

ABOUT PERTUSSIS

- Pertussis is an acute infection of the respiratory tract caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.
- Pertussis is transmitted through contact with respiratory droplets. Patients are highly communicable during the first two weeks of illness. Communicability gradually decreases and becomes negligible in about three weeks.
- Symptoms appear in three stages:
 - **First stage (1-2 weeks):** symptoms are similar to those of the common cold - low grade fever, runny nose, nasal congestion, sneezing, red and watery eyes, cough.
 - **Second stage (1-6 weeks or longer):** coughing spells that end in a high-pitched whoop, or vomiting, shortness of breath or exhaustion from coughing so much.
 - **Final stage (1-2 months):** coughing spells gradually occur less often and become less severe.
- Young infants are at highest risk of developing severe complications from pertussis.

KEY MESSAGES FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

- **Ensure patients are up-to-date with pertussis immunizations:**
 - Routine pertussis immunization of infants, children and adolescents: DTaP-IPV-Hib vaccine should be provided at 2, 4, 6 and 18 months. 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). 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 all vaccinations to Public Health at www.halton.ca/immunize.

DIAGNOSTIC TESTING

- Suspect cases must be placed under droplet precautions, in addition to routine practices. The patient must wear a medical mask, not wait in the waiting area and be brought immediately to an examination room.
- Patients with symptoms consistent with pertussis should have a **Bordetella Nasopharyngeal Swab** collected and sent for PCR testing as soon as possible, within the first 3 weeks of illness.
- Follow the instructions found in [Bordetella Pertussis Kit](#) as it is **the only acceptable transport medium for pertussis**.
- 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](#).

Note: PCR 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.

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).
- 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, Ontario](#)
3. [Pertussis Vaccines: Canadian Immunization Guide](#)

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