

Information Note
Department of Health and Community Services

Title: Increase in pertussis cases reported to the Department of Health and Community Services

Issue: To provide a summary of the increased number of pertussis cases since March 2024 and actions being taken by the Population Health Division.

Background:

- *Bordetella pertussis*, also known as “whooping cough,” is a vaccine preventable bacterial infection that starts as a runny nose, mild fever, red watery eyes, and a mild cough. Infections can progress to severe coughing episodes that can last eight weeks. The name “whooping cough” comes from the sound a person makes when making a deep inhalation after severe coughing.
- In infants less than one year old, pertussis can cause temporary episodes when their breathing stops, called apnea. Severe coughing episodes can also lead to choking, poor feeding, and difficulty breathing. Complications of pertussis include pneumonia, seizures, and brain damage.
- Pertussis is treated with antibiotics and is spread through droplets produced during coughing or sneezing.
- Vaccination is the most effective means of controlling the spread of pertussis. Pertussis vaccines are part of the province’s childhood immunization schedule and is given at two, four, six, and 18 months, before school starts at four to six years old, and in grade nine. After this series of vaccines, the vaccine is 90 per cent effective.
- Adults should receive a booster 10 years after their booster in grade nine (after 24 years old).
- Pregnant women are vaccinated between 27 and 32 weeks of pregnancy regardless of their vaccine history because the antibodies produced as an immune response to the vaccine are transferred to the fetus during pregnancy and protects most newborns up to two to three months of age.
- Contacts of individuals with pertussis are eligible for antibiotics as post-exposure prophylaxis if they are at high-risk for severe pertussis infection. High risk contacts are infants less than one year of age regardless of vaccine history and pregnant woman in the third trimester.
- Similar to respiratory viruses, pertussis follows a seasonal trend with more cases seen in the fall and winter. On average, three to four cases are expected each year.

Analysis:

- Since January 1, 2024, a total of [REDACTED] cases were reported, with [REDACTED] in Western and [REDACTED] in Eastern zones.
- On March 20, 2024, HCS was notified of [REDACTED] cases of pertussis in the Western zone. [REDACTED]

- On March 27, 2024, HCS was notified of [REDACTED] pertussis [REDACTED] in the Eastern zone. [REDACTED] pertussis cases were reported in the Eastern zone from January to February 2024 and [REDACTED].
- Nationally, 78 pertussis cases have been reported in Alberta between January 1 and February 21, 2024, and 37 pertussis cases were identified in British Columbia as of March 11, 2024. BC Centre for Disease Control reports the number of cases in British Columbia for 2024 is still within expected range when compared to the pre-pandemic years between 2014 to 2020 but above the average number of cases seen during the pandemic 2021-2023.
- Globally, several countries have reported higher than usual numbers of pertussis cases this year.
- All pertussis cases were investigated by NLHS Public Health. No cases had contacts that were at high risk of severe illness and no contacts required post-exposure prophylaxis.
- No link was found among the reported cases.
- [REDACTED] NLHS Public Health division notified the school community of the exposure while maintaining the privacy [REDACTED]. There may be other similar notifications for future cases which could gain interest on social media.

Action Being Taken:

- HCS released a memo to healthcare providers on April 11, 2024, to encourage their patients in contact with infants and pregnant people to ensure their pertussis vaccination status is up to date.
- Public advisory released on April 12, 2024, encouraged public to be up to date with vaccinations.
- NLHS Public Health program will continue to investigate any pertussis cases and conduct contact tracing.
- HCS will continue to monitor the number of pertussis cases in the province and support NLHS Public Health investigations.

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