

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: October 1, 2024

RE: Pertussis cases continue to rise in Halton – testing and treatment reminders

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## QUICK FACTS

- In Ontario, there have been 1,016 cases of pertussis between January and September 2024. Most cases were among children. Halton Region Public Health investigated 10 cases between Aug. 27 and Sept. 24.
- Consider pertussis in your differential diagnosis in patients with a cough ending in a high-pitched whoop or vomiting, shortness of breath or exhaustion from coughing, **or with a cough lasting two weeks or more.**
- To facilitate timely testing, ensure [Bordetella Nasopharyngeal swabs](#) are readily available.
- Appropriate treatment includes macrolides or trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole as an alternative. **Beta-lactams, including amoxicillin, are not effective against *B. pertussis*.**
- **All probable and confirmed cases of pertussis should be reported immediately to Halton Region by calling 311, 905-825-6000 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866.**

## PERTUSSIS SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT

- Pertussis is an acute infection of the respiratory tract caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.
- Transmission is through contact with respiratory droplets and 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.
- Appropriate treatment includes macrolides (azithromycin, erythromycin, clarithromycin) or trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole as an alternative. Beta-lactams, including amoxicillin, are not effective.

## DIAGNOSTIC TESTING

- Suspect cases must be placed under droplet precautions, in addition to routine practices.
- Patients with symptoms consistent with pertussis should be tested within the first 3 weeks of illness using the [Bordetella Pertussis Kit](#) **as it is the only acceptable transport medium for pertussis.** Order appropriate specimen collection supplies, use the Public Health Ontario Laboratory (PHOL) [Requisition for Specimen Containers and Supplies](#). Refer to [Bordetella - Respiratory - PCR | Public Health Ontario](#) for additional testing details. Pertussis swabs have a three-month shelf life.

Please report all suspected/confirmed cases of [Diseases of Public Health Significance](#) (only report COVID-19 cases occurring in high-risk settings) to Public Health immediately by calling 311, 905-825-6000 or toll free at 1-866-442-5866.

PLEASE PROVIDE A COPY TO ALL PHYSICIANS IN YOUR OFFICE AND/OR POST IN EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS AND PHYSICIAN LOUNGES. IF YOU HAVE ANY ISSUES WITH THIS ATTACHMENT, PLEASE EMAIL [DOCTORS@HALTON.CA](mailto:DOCTORS@HALTON.CA).