

PRESS RELEASE

# Health Alert

October 9th, 2024



Whitman County  
Public Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Pertussis Activity in Whitman County

Questions regarding this information may be directed to the following contacts:

**Whitman County Public Health**

**Disease Prevention Program**

DiseasePrevention@whitmancounty.gov

Whitman County Public Health (WCPH) is investigating a pertussis outbreak within the WSU student population and one case within the broader community. There are 18 Pertussis cases identified as of 10/8/2024.

### Alert Categories



#### Health Alert

Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.



#### Health Advisory

Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.



#### Health Update

Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.

## Summary

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18 individuals in Whitman County as of 10/8/2024 have been diagnosed with a confirmed case of B. pertussis.

We are asking all current cases to **isolate** until they have completed their 5-day course of antibiotics prescribed by their provider.

**Isolation** means staying away from others—no going to work, school, or public places. It's important that you stay home to avoid spreading the infection to others.

- Infants under 12 months of age and people with pre-existing health conditions that may be exacerbated by pertussis are at the highest risk of getting very sick from pertussis. Please take extra precautions to protect these people from getting sick.
- If you need to seek healthcare or leave isolation for any reason before you have finished 5 days of antibiotics, please wear a mask to prevent the spread of pertussis.

While there is currently no outbreak within the broader community, we are still encouraging all residents to take the preventive measures below.

## Requested Actions

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- Be aware of pertussis potentially circulating in the community.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you have been a **close contact** with someone diagnosed with pertussis.

You are considered a **close contact** of someone with pertussis if:

- You live in the same household as someone with pertussis.
- You spent many hours together while they were symptomatic (e.g.: cough, runny nose, low-grade fever, etc.). This could include being in the same room, household, or a confined space like a car.
- You had direct contact with respiratory droplets, such as coughing, sneezing, kissing, or sharing utensils with the infected person.

- Make sure you are up to date with your pertussis immunization (DTaP, Tdap).
  - Anyone who is not up to date on their pertussis immunization schedule should seek care with their healthcare provider to update. Please see the "Pertussis Prevention" section below for more information on what it means to be up to date on your pertussis immunization.
- Practice good hand, mouth, and nose hygiene.
  - Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your elbow when you cough or sneeze. Throw away used tissues right away and wash your hands.
  - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Stay home when sick and limit your exposure to people who are sick.

## What is Pertussis?

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Pertussis (whooping cough) is a well-known and serious respiratory illness caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.

## How is Pertussis Spread?

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Person-to-person spread of pertussis occurs through small drops of spit from your mouth or nose when you talk, cough, or sneeze. Spread is most likely among people who live together or people who spend time together indoors.

## What are the Symptoms of Pertussis?

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It begins with cold-like symptoms and develops into a bad cough.

Coughing spells can be severe, sometimes ending in gagging or vomiting. Some kids also may have a high-pitched “whoop” after they cough, which is how the disease got its common name. However, infants may not cough at all, and some teens and adults don’t have a “whoop” after they cough.

Complications of pertussis include pneumonia, syncope (passing out), seizures, apnea (stopping breathing), and death. Severe complications are most common in infants.

## Who is at High Risk for Pertussis?

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People at high risk for severe illness from pertussis:

- Infants under 1 year old are at greatest risk for severe disease and death
- People with pre-existing health conditions that may be exacerbated by pertussis

Those who will have contact with people at high risk:

- Pregnant women in third trimester: Women in their third trimester of pregnancy may be a source of pertussis to their newborn infant.
- All people in high-risk settings: This is focused in particular on settings that include infants under 12 months of age or women in their third trimester of pregnancy. These settings include:
  - Neonatal intensive care units
  - Childcare settings
  - Maternity wards

## Pertussis Prevention

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### Immunization is the most effective way to prevent pertussis.

- DTaP Immunization: For infants and young children, this vaccine is given in a series of five doses (at 2, 4, 6, 15–18 months, and 4–6 years).
- Tdap Immunization: Adolescents (11–12 years old) should receive the Tdap immunization, which provides continued protection against pertussis.
  - If you never received a Tdap booster as an adolescent, a single dose is recommended for adults.
- Pregnancy Vaccination: Pregnant women are advised to receive the Tdap vaccine during the third trimester (between 27 and 36 weeks of pregnancy) for **every pregnancy** to protect newborns before they can receive their vaccinations.

Pertussis vaccines are effective, but not perfect. They typically offer good levels of protection within the first two years after getting the vaccine, but protection wanes over time. In general, DTaP vaccines are 80% to 90% effective.

### Practice good hand, mouth, and nose hygiene.

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw away used tissues in the wastebasket right away.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

### Stay home when sick and limit your exposure to people who are sick.

- If you have respiratory symptoms and must leave home, please consider wearing a mask to prevent spreading small drops of spit from your mouth or nose when you talk, cough, or sneeze.
- If someone has pertussis, they should isolate, particularly from vulnerable individuals (such as infants or the elderly), until they have been treated with antibiotics for 5 days or 21 days have passed since symptoms began.

## Pertussis Testing

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There are tests available for Pertussis. PCR (Polymerase chain reaction) testing is currently the preferred test method for pertussis.

However, a negative test does not mean a person should stop treatment. The full prescription should be taken as directed by your care provider.

## Pertussis Treatment

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If pertussis is diagnosed, early treatment with antibiotics can reduce the spread of the disease to others. Close contacts of someone with pertussis may also be prescribed preventive antibiotics.

Infected individuals should stay home and avoid contact with others until they have completed at least 5 days of antibiotic treatment or stay home for 21 days after the onset of symptoms to avoid spreading the infection.