

Pertussis Response – December 2012

To: Health Care Providers
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– Please Distribute Widely –

The Health Department will hold a press conference on Dec. 13 to raise awareness about the pertussis epidemic that is ongoing in Vermont, and to announce Tdap Clinic Day at Health Department district offices on Dec. 19. (*See details below.*)

To date in 2012, there have been 522 confirmed cases of pertussis reported to the Health Department. Twenty-three confirmed cases were in babies younger than 1 year of age, and children ages 10 to 14 years are at highest risk for infection. All Vermont counties have reported pertussis activity in 2012, and recent (previous six weeks) activity has been highest in Rutland County.

Treatment and Prophylaxis

Pertussis should be considered in anyone with a severe or persistent cough.
If you suspect pertussis:

1. *Treat* the patient whether or not you test. Do not wait for test results. Negative test results do not rule out pertussis.
2. *Exclude* the patient from work, school, or child care until s/he completes five full days of appropriate antibiotics.
3. *Ensure that the entire household is treated with preventive antibiotics.*

Testing for Pertussis

Testing can be helpful to clinicians in differentiating pertussis from other respiratory illnesses. Testing is appropriate until at least three weeks after onset of paroxysmal coughing. After three weeks of cough, infectiousness and test accuracy decrease significantly.

Testing is not essential for every suspected case when pertussis is known to be circulating in a community. Testing is most critical for symptomatic high-risk people and their contacts, including:

- Infants younger than 1 year
- Pregnant women
- People who may expose infants or pregnant women (e.g., people who spend time in childcare settings where infants are present, members of a household with infants)
- Health care workers with direct patient contact
- Patients suspected of being part of an outbreak in an institutional setting

Indeterminate Pertussis PCR Results

Under Vermont's reportable disease regulations, clinicians are asked to report cases of known or suspected pertussis. The Vermont Department of Health Laboratory reports *Bordetella pertussis* Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) results as positive, negative, or indeterminate. An indeterminate result means that a low level of target DNA was detected in the specimen. The clinical significance of this is not known, and test results should be interpreted in combination with available clinical and epidemiological information.

For patients with indeterminate pertussis PCR results:

- Treat patients with clinical pertussis symptoms and recommend prophylaxis for household contacts. Have a lower threshold for recommending prophylaxis when household contacts include infants, pregnant women, or other high-risk contacts.
- Report case to the Health Department if the patient has exposed high-risk contacts (e.g., attends or works in childcare setting; works in a health care setting). Public health investigations will not be initiated for these cases unless the medical practice reports the case as having high-risk contacts.

Immunization Recommendations

As part of the effort to improve Tdap coverage and decrease the burden of pertussis, please remember that:

- The Immunization Registry can be used to identify individuals who have not received Tdap vaccine.
- The "Not Up To Date" report in the Immunization Registry allows you to print a list of all patients in the practice under age 18 who are not up to date for Tdap. The report gives you the option to print labels for recall. If you have questions about using this report, call the Registry's user support line at (888) 688-4667.
- As a VFA-enrolled provider, you can use state-supplied Tdap to immunize parents or other adults accompanying children to your office. The Lifetime Immunization Record can be used to record the immunization, so adults receiving Tdap can provide written documentation to their PCP.
- All vaccines administered should be entered in the Immunization Registry.

Press Conference (Dec. 13) and Tdap Clinic Day (Dec. 19)

The Health Department is holding a press conference on Thursday, December 13 at 1:30 to discuss the state's response to pertussis, the need for older children and adults to have their Tdap vaccination, and the importance of taking action to protect babies who are most at risk for serious complications and death. We will also announce that Health Department district offices will offer free Tdap vaccination for anyone age 11 and older who needs it on 'Tdap clinic day' – Wednesday, Dec. 19 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

This could result in more calls to your office as patients may have questions.

For more information: healthvermont.gov/prevent/pertussis/Pertussis.aspx.

Report suspected cases to the Epidemiology Field Unit by calling 802-863-7240.