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## **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Reports Increase in Pertussis Cases in the United States**

**Pertussis**, also known as **whooping cough**, is a highly contagious respiratory illness with outbreaks occurring every 3-5 years. People with pertussis spread the disease by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the pertussis germ.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), over the past few years, during and directly following the COVID-19 pandemic, reports of pertussis cases were lower than usual. This is likely due to mitigation measures used during the pandemic (like masking, remote learning, and social distancing), which led to lower pertussis transmission. However, the United States is beginning to return to pre-pandemic patterns, where more than 100,000 cases are typically reported each year. The rates of pertussis are increasing quickly, with preliminary data showing that more than six times as many cases of pertussis have been reported this December in comparison to December 2023.

*Please note* that **Bedford is not experiencing an outbreak of pertussis**. Pertussis rates in Bedford are in line with surrounding towns.

### **Signs and Symptoms**

In general, pertussis begins with gradual onset of mild upper respiratory tract symptoms (runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever, and mild cough) lasting 1-2 weeks. After this time period, the mild cough may progress to bursts of numerous, rapid coughs accompanied by a high-pitched “whoop”. Depending on the severity of the attack, vomiting and fatigue may follow. This stage lasts 1-10 weeks, followed by a gradual recovery period.

It is important to note that symptoms vary with age. Infants may only have short bursts of coughing, followed by gagging, gasping, and abnormal breathing patterns, but not followed by the classic “whoop”. Vaccinated adolescent and adult individuals may only have a prolonged cough.

### **Treatment**

Early antibiotic treatment for pertussis may make the illness less severe and help prevent spreading the pertussis germ to others. In some cases, household contacts of the sick person may have to be treated with antibiotics as well.

## Pertussis in Babies

Babies younger than one year old are at greatest risk for getting pertussis and developing severe complications. About one third of babies younger than 12 months old who get pertussis need to be hospitalized.

### Prevention: Vaccination

Pertussis vaccines, which also provide protection from diphtheria and tetanus, are the best way to protect against pertussis and its complications. The CDC recommends pertussis vaccines for all babies, children, preteens, pregnant people, and unvaccinated adults. Infants and children younger than 7 years old receive the DTaP vaccine, while older children and adults receive the Tdap vaccine.


DTaP: The CDC recommends administering a 5-dose DTaP series, 1 dose at each of the following ages:

- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- 15 through 18 months
- 4 through 6 years


Tdap: The CDC recommends administering a single dose of the Tdap vaccine:

- At 11-12 years of age
- During every pregnancy, preferable during the early part of gestational weeks 27 through 36
- To any previously unvaccinated adults

**People of all ages need WHOOPING COUGH VACCINES**



<b>DTaP</b> for young children	<b>Tdap</b> for preteens	<b>Tdap</b> for pregnant women	<b>Tdap</b> for adults
✓ 2, 4, and 6 months ✓ 15 through 18 months ✓ 4 through 6 years	✓ 11 through 12 years	✓ During the 27-36th week of each pregnancy	✓ Anytime for those who have never received it

[www.cdc.gov/whoopingcough](http://www.cdc.gov/whoopingcough) 

## **Prevention: Mitigation Measures**

Having good health habits can reduce the spread of pertussis.

- Wash your hands with soap and water (if no soap is available, use hand sanitizer with an alcohol concentration of 60-95%)
- Cover your mouth when you cough and sneeze with your elbow
- Stay home when you're feeling sick
- Wear a mask when you're feeling sick when around others

## **Questions?**

Please contact the Health Department at 781-275-6507 or email us at [BOH@bedfordma.gov](mailto:BOH@bedfordma.gov).

## **References**

<https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/hcp/vaccine-recommendations/index.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncird/whats-new/cases-of-whooping-cough-on-the-rise.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/php/surveillance/index.html>