

Date: April 27, 2023

To: Students and families, teachers and school staff

From: Dr. Vivien Suttorp, Lead Medical Officer of Health, South Zone

RE: Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

A pertussis (Whooping cough) outbreak declared Jan. 26, 2023 is still growing in southern Alberta. More than 144 cases have been identified in communities throughout the South Zone of Alberta Health Services (AHS), including in Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and smaller communities.

Most cases have been children under 10 years old. So far, five children have been so sick they had to be hospitalized. Newborns and young children are most vulnerable for severe illness and complications.

Cases have been identified at schools and other community locations such as churches and sites where children gather to take lessons. Public Health is unable to identify linkages between most of the recent cases, indicating there is likely more disease circulating in communities that is not being reported.

When someone has pertussis, they are contagious to others for 21 days. As well, the incubation period can be as long as 21 days, making the possibility of spreading the illness much greater. Adults infected with pertussis may have milder symptoms than children but are still infectious.

Pertussis is a bacterial infection and not a virus, which means *early* treatment with appropriate antibiotics can reduce the severity and limit the spread of the illness, as well as shorten the time required to stay at home. People with confirmed pertussis should stay home until five days of treatment with appropriate antibiotics have been completed. If a person does not take antibiotics, the recommendation is to stay home for the full 21 days in order to not spread the disease to others.

AHS is issuing a reminder to all people of the importance of immunization, particularly in small children, to prevent further illness. Pertussis causes severe and prolonged coughing that lasts for weeks. It can impact people of all ages but infants one year and younger are at greatest risk of serious complications, including pneumonia, convulsions, brain damage and death.

All Alberta residents are reminded to ensure they are up to date on their immunizations and to stay home when sick. Individuals uncertain of their child's or their own immunization history can contact their local community health centre or public health office.

The vaccine that covers pertussis is offered in schools (with parental consent) in Grade 9. See [Alberta's Routine Childhood Immunization schedule](#) for more information.

If you suspect you are sick with pertussis, seek *early* medical assessment first by calling your primary care provider or 811 for potential treatment.

Additional information on pertussis and immunizations can be found online at the following links:

- [Whooping Cough \(Pertussis\) \(alberta.ca\)](#)
- [Pertussis \(Whooping Cough\) | AHS Immunization \(immunizealberta.ca\) Immunization and routine immunization schedule | Alberta.ca](#)