

Monday, 06 November 2023

## Health Protection

### Whooping cough (pertussis) | HSC Public Health Agency factsheet for primary care practitioners

#### Background

The information in this factsheet has been developed to help health professionals identify and test appropriately for suspected cases of whooping cough (pertussis).

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a notifiable disease under the Public Health Act (NI) 1987. Health professionals have a duty of care to report all suspected and confirmed cases to public health to ensure that contacts are managed promptly.

Notifiable cases should be notified to:  
Public Health Agency (PHA) Health  
Protection Duty Room  
Telephone: 0300 555 0118;  
Email: [pha.dutyroom@hscni.net](mailto:pha.dutyroom@hscni.net)

Pertussis is a highly contagious, vaccine-preventable, respiratory disease that is caused by the *Bordetella pertussis* bacterium. It can affect people of all ages, and can cause serious and life-threatening complications. Young unimmunised infants are the most vulnerable group with the highest rates of complication and death.

Pertussis activity tends to peak every three to four years. In 2012, cases peaked above anticipated levels across the United Kingdom (UK), and as a result a UK-wide national

outbreak was declared in April 2012. Following further increases in disease and a number of deaths in young infants, in October 2012 the then Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety launched a vaccination programme to vaccinate all pregnant women from week 18 of pregnancy. This immunisation is important to protect infants from birth until they can receive their first primary vaccines at two months of age.

Since 2012, the annual number of laboratory confirmed cases of pertussis in Northern Ireland has remained higher than before 2012. In 2017, there were 72 confirmed cases, a decrease since 2016 (110 cases). The greatest number of cases is in those aged over 25 years (50%) who usually suffer milder disease with a cough that may persist for many weeks.

#### Clinical features

The clinical presentation of pertussis is influenced by a variety of factors including the patient's age and vaccine status. The incubation period is on average between 7–10 days (range 5–21 days).

Classical symptoms are most often seen in children and consist of three symptomatic stages of illness: catarrhal stage; paroxysmal stage (frequent episodes of paroxysmal coughing and inspiratory 'whooping' which can be accompanied by vomiting); and a convalescent

[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)

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## Details

Format

4 pages A4 (PDF only)

Target group

Health professionals

## Downloads

**Attachment****Size**

[Pertussis factsheet for practioners FINAL 1023.pdf](#) 254.98 KB

[Print](#)