

Pertussis (whooping cough) in Northern Ireland
Public Health Agency

02 May 2025

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Updates to this report will be published monthly.

1 Summary

- From 01 January 2025 to 30 April, 56 clinically suspected pertussis cases have been notified to the Public Health Agency.
- Of those notified during 2025 to 30 April, 45 were confirmed.

2 Background

Pertussis (also known as “whooping cough”) is a highly contagious but vaccine preventable bacterial respiratory disease that is usually caused by *Bordetella pertussis*. It is normally characterised by a “whooping” cough, cold and fever. For more information about pertussis, please visit [NI Direct | Pertussis](#). Pertussis typically follows a cyclical pattern with epidemics occurring every three to five years. For more information about previous years’ reports, please visit [PHA | Annual VPD Reports](#).

A vaccine against pertussis, which also provides protection against diphtheria, tetanus, polio, Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib) and hepatitis B (DTap/IPV/Hib/HepB vaccine) is included in the Northern Ireland childhood vaccination schedule at age two, three, and four months. A further booster against pertussis (also protecting against diphtheria, tetanus and polio) is provided three years after the primary course and before school entry. Vaccination against pertussis can also be offered prenatally (to pregnant women) ideally from 16 weeks up to 32 weeks pregnant.

For more information on the childhood immunisation programme, please visit [NI Direct | Childhood immunisation programme](#) and for further information on pertussis vaccination for pregnant women, please visit [NI Direct | Whooping cough vaccination for pregnant women](#).

Details of case definitions and methods are at the end of this document. Data were correct at 30 April 2025.

3 Pertussis notifications, 2024-2025

The number of notified clinically suspected pertussis cases from the start of 2024 until the report date (30 April 2025) are shown (Table [3.1](#)).

Table 3.1: Counts of pertussis notifications, 2024-2025.

	2024	2025
	(N=3612)	(N=56)
Case category		
Confirmed	3061 (84.7%)	45 (80.4%)
Probable	551 (15.3%)	11 (19.6%)

Please note: in the table above data for 2025 is up to 30 April

3.1 Trends

Pertussis notifications in Northern Ireland increased between January 2024 and May 2024 (Figure [3.1](#)). The noted increases are partly attributable to increased awareness. The number of cases reported in May 2024 were the highest during any month in 2024. There were 3061 confirmed pertussis cases reported in 2024. The highest number of confirmed cases were reported in those aged 5-9 years (590), 10-14 years (711) and 25 years and older (972). PHA received updated serological lab reports resulting in an artefactual rise in notifications in the following months; July 2024 (n=86), August 2024 (n=6) and September 2024 (n=120). These results relate to tests during the period January to August 2024. Excluding the historic notifications, the number of notifications reported per month has continued to decrease since peaking in May 2024. The decrease in notifications followed a change in testing guidance and updated case definition which includes epidemiological confirmation of cases (details of case definitions are at the end of this document). There have been 56 notifications of pertussis in 2025 to 30 April, of which 45 were

laboratory confirmed. PHA received serological lab reports in February 2025, these results relate to tests performed in 2024 (n=32). The rate of confirmed cases per 100,000 population increased between January 2024 and May 2024. The highest rate of confirmed cases were observed in those aged under 1 year (176.2 cases per 100,000) and 10-14 years (180.2 cases per 100,000) in May 2024. The rate of confirmed cases remains low in all age groups in 2025 (Figure [3.2](#)).

The supplementary table below shows counts of pertussis notifications recorded by month and by age group.

Incidence of pertussis notifications, by month of notification, all ages, 2024-2025.
Figure 3.1: Incidence of pertussis notifications, by month of notification, all ages, 2024-2025.

Rate of confirmed pertussis cases, by month of notification, by age group, 2024-2025.
Figure 3.2: Rate of confirmed pertussis cases, by month of notification, by age group, 2024-2025.

4 Discussion

There have been 45 confirmed pertussis cases notified during 2025, most related to tests performed in 2024. There was an increase in notifications of clinically suspected and confirmed pertussis in 2024. Similar increases have been reported in multiple countries across [Europe](#). The number of pertussis cases reported during 2020 to 2023 had been particularly low, a secondary impact of interventions to control the spread of COVID-19. The highest number of confirmed cases in 2024 were reported in those aged 5-9 years, 10-14 years and 25 years and older. The highest rates of confirmed pertussis in 2024 were reported in those aged under 15 years of age. Rates of confirmed pertussis in 2025 to date remain low in all age groups.

Pertussis vaccine coverage has reduced in Northern Ireland during recent years; [NI PHA | Vaccination coverage](#). Increasing coverage of pertussis vaccination, both prenatal and in childhood, is crucial to ensure widespread protection and keep cases of pertussis low.

5 Methods

Pertussis notifications are reported by clinicians to the Public Health Agency and were extracted from the case management database. Pertussis is notifiable in

Northern Ireland under the Public Health Act (1967) Northern Ireland.

Cases are presented by the date that they were recorded on the PHA database. Notified cases will be removed from future reports if PHA is notified that clinical investigations later result in an alternative diagnosis. Updated lab results will be added to future reports based on the date they were notified to the PHA. Numbers may therefore change from previous reports.

Data were processed using R.

5.1 Pertussis Case Definitions

Confirmed case:

Signs and symptoms consistent with pertussis, with a laboratory confirmation of acute infection

Or

A suspected case with signs and symptoms consistent with pertussis, but no laboratory confirmation, who was in contact with a laboratory confirmed case of pertussis in the 21 days before the onset of symptoms (i.e. epidemiologically linked case).

Probable case: Any person in whom a clinician suspects pertussis infection or any person with an acute cough lasting for 14 days or more, without an apparent cause plus one or more of the following:

- paroxysms of coughing
- post-tussive vomiting
- inspiratory whoop

AND an absence of laboratory confirmation with no epidemiological link to a confirmed case.

The case definitions were updated on 24 June 2024.

6 Supplementary Tables

Table 6.1: Count of pertussis notifications by case category and month of notification, 2025.

```
#lvspevstxx table { font-family: system-ui, 'Segoe UI', Roboto, Helvetica, Arial, sans-serif, 'Apple Color Emoji', 'Segoe UI Emoji', 'Segoe UI Symbol', 'Noto Color Emoji'; -webkit-font-smoothing: antialiased; -moz-osx-font-smoothing: grayscale; }
#lvspevstxx thead, #lvspevstxx tbody, #lvspevstxx tfoot, #lvspevstxx tr,
#lvspevstxx td, #lvspevstxx th { border-style: none; } #lvspevstxx p { margin: 0; padding: 0; } #lvspevstxx .gt_table { display: table; border-collapse: collapse; line-height: normal; margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto; color: #333333; font-size: 16px; font-weight: normal; font-style: normal; background-color: #FFFFFF; width: auto; border-top-style: solid; border-top-width: 2px; border-top-color: #A8A8A8; border-right-style: none; border-right-width: 2px; border-right-color: #D3D3D3; border-bottom-style: solid; border-bottom-width: 2px; border-bottom-color: #A8A8A8; border-left-style: none; border-left-width: 2px; border-left-color: #D3D3D3; } #lvspevstxx .gt_caption { padding-top: 4px; padding-bottom: 4px; } #lvspevstxx .gt_title { color: #333333; font-size: 125%; font-weight: initial; padding-top: 4px; padding-bottom: 4px; padding-left: 5px; padding-right: 5px; border-bottom-color: #FFFFFF; border-bottom-width: 0; } #lvspevstxx .gt_subtitle { color: #333333; font-size: 85%; font-weight: initial; padding-top: 3px; padding-bottom: 5px; padding-left: 5px; padding-right: 5px; border-top-color: #FFFFFF; border-top-width: 0; } #lvspevstxx .gt_heading { background-color: #FFFFFF; text-align: center; border-bottom-color: #FFFFFF; border-left-style: none; border-left-width: 1px; border-left-color: #D3D3D3; border-right-style: none; border-right-width: 1px; border-right-color: #D3D3D3; } #lvspevstxx .gt_bottom_border { border-bottom-style: solid; border-bottom-width: 2px; border-bottom-color: #D3D3D3; } #lvspevstxx .gt_col_headings { border-top-style: solid; border-top-width: 2px; border-top-color: #D3D3D3; border-bottom-style: solid; border-bottom-width: 2px; border-bottom-color: #D3D3D3; border-left-style: none; border-left-width: 1px; border-left-color: #D3D3D3; border-right-style: none; border-right-width: 1px; border-right-color: #D3D3D3; } #lvspevstxx .gt_col_heading { color: #333333; background-color: #FFFFFF; font-size: 100%; font-weight: normal; text-transform: inherit; border-left-style: none; border-left-width: 1px; border-left-color: #D3D3D3; border-right-style: none; border-right-width: 1px; border-right-color: #D3D3D3; vertical-align: bottom; padding-top: 5px; padding-bottom: 6px; padding-left: 5px; padding-right: 5px; overflow-x: hidden; } #lvspevstxx .gt_column_spanner_outer { color: #333333; background-color: #FFFFFF; font-size: 100%; font-weight: normal; text-transform: inherit; padding-top: 0; padding-bottom: 0; padding-left: 4px; padding-right: 4px; } #lvspevstxx .gt_column_spanner_outer:first-child { padding-left: 0; } #lvspevstxx .gt_column_spanner_outer:last-child { padding-right: 0; } #lvspevstxx .gt_column_spanner { border-bottom-style: solid; border-bottom-width:
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#lvspevstxx .gt_right { text-align: right; font-variant-numeric: tabular-nums; }
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}
```

Month of Report	Case category		Total
	Confirmed	Probable	
2025-01-01	4	1	5

	Case category		Total
	Confirmed	Probable	
2025-02-01	35	5	40
2025-03-01	0	3	3
2025-04-01	6	2	8
Total	45	11	56

Table 6.2: Count of confirmed pertussis cases by age group and month of notification, 2025.

```
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#pxpwsjjzix thead, #pxpwsjjzix tbody, #pxpwsjjzix tfoot, #pxpwsjjzix tr, #pxpwsjjzix td, #pxpwsjjzix th { border-style: none; } #pxpwsjjzix p { margin: 0; padding: 0; }
#pxpwsjjzix .gt_table { display: table; border-collapse: collapse; line-height: normal; margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto; color: #333333; font-size: 16px; font-weight: normal; font-style: normal; background-color: #FFFFFF; width: auto; border-top-style: solid; border-top-width: 2px; border-top-color: #A8A8A8; border-right-style: none; border-right-width: 2px; border-right-color: #D3D3D3; border-bottom-style: solid; border-bottom-width: 2px; border-bottom-color: #A8A8A8; border-left-style: none; border-left-width: 2px; border-left-color: #D3D3D3; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_caption { padding-top: 4px; padding-bottom: 4px; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_title { color: #333333; font-size: 125%; font-weight: initial; padding-top: 4px; padding-bottom: 4px; padding-left: 5px; padding-right: 5px; border-bottom-color: #FFFFFF; border-bottom-width: 0; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_subtitle { color: #333333; font-size: 85%; font-weight: initial; padding-top: 3px; padding-bottom: 5px; padding-left: 5px; padding-right: 5px; border-top-color: #FFFFFF; border-top-width: 0; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_heading { background-color: #FFFFFF; text-align: center; border-bottom-color: #FFFFFF; border-left-style: none; border-left-width: 1px; border-left-color: #D3D3D3; border-right-style: none; border-right-width: 1px; border-right-color: #D3D3D3; }
#pxpwsjjzix .gt_bottom_border { border-bottom-style: solid; border-bottom-width: 2px; border-bottom-color: #D3D3D3; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_col_headings { border-top-style: solid; border-top-width: 2px; border-top-color: #D3D3D3; border-bottom-style: solid; border-bottom-width: 2px; border-bottom-color: #D3D3D3; border-left-style: none; border-left-width: 1px; border-left-color: #D3D3D3; border-right-style: none; border-right-width: 1px; border-right-color: #D3D3D3; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_col_heading { color: #333333; background-color: #FFFFFF; font-size: 100%; font-weight: normal;
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.gt_column_spanner_outer:first-child { padding-left: 0; } #pxpwsjjzix
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.gt_from_md > :first-child { margin-top: 0; } #pxpwsjjzix
.gt_from_md > :last-child { margin-bottom: 0; } #pxpwsjjzix
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.gt_row_group_first td { border-top-width: 2px; } #pxpwsjjzix
.gt_row_group_first th { border-top-width: 2px; }
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top-width: 2px; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_last_summary_row { padding-top: 8px; padding-
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border-bottom-color: #D3D3D3; border-left-style: none; border-left-width: 2px;
border-left-color: #D3D3D3; border-right-style: none; border-right-width: 2px;
border-right-color: #D3D3D3; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_sourcenote { font-size: 90%;
padding-top: 4px; padding-bottom: 4px; padding-left: 5px; padding-right: 5px; }
#pxpwsjjzix .gt_left { text-align: left; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_center { text-align: center; }
#pxpwsjjzix .gt_right { text-align: right; font-variant-numeric: tabular-nums; }
#pxpwsjjzix .gt_font_normal { font-weight: normal; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_font_bold {
font-weight: bold; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_font_italic { font-style: italic; } #pxpwsjjzix
.gt_super { font-size: 65%; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_footnote_marks { font-size: 75%;
vertical-align: 0.4em; position: initial; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_asterisk { font-size: 100%;
vertical-align: 0; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_indent_1 { text-indent: 5px; } #pxpwsjjzix
.gt_indent_2 { text-indent: 10px; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_indent_3 { text-indent: 15px; }
#pxpwsjjzix .gt_indent_4 { text-indent: 20px; } #pxpwsjjzix .gt_indent_5 { text-
```

```

indent: 25px; } #pxpwsjjzix .katex-display { display: inline-flex !important; margin-
bottom: 0.75em !important; } #pxpwsjjzix div.Reactable > div.rt-table > div.rt-
thead > div.rt-tr.rt-tr-group-header > div.rt-th-group:after { height: 0px !important;
}

```

Month of notification	Age group (years)							Total
	under 1	1-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25+	
2025-01-01	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	4
2025-02-01	1	1	0	1	1	2	29	35
2025-04-01	1	1	0	1	3	0	0	6
Total	4	3	0	2	4	2	30	45

```

// add bootstrap table styles to pandoc tables function bootstrapStylePandocTables()
{ $('tr.odd').parent('tbody').parent('table').addClass('table table-condensed'); }
$(document).ready(function () { bootstrapStylePandocTables(); });
$(document).ready(function () { window.buildTabsets("TOC"); });
$(document).ready(function () { $('<div>.tabset-dropdown > .nav-tabs > li').click(function
() { $(this).parent().toggleClass('nav-tabs-open'); }); }); (function () { var script =
document.createElement("script"); script.type = "text/javascript"; script.src =
"https://mathjax.rstudio.com/latest/MathJax.js?config=TeX-AMS-MML_HTMLorMML";
document.getElementsByTagName("head")[0].appendChild(script); })();

```

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