



Date: December 6, 2024

RE: Increased Pertussis Activity in Lincoln County

This Health Alert Message is to notify that Lincoln County has had confirmed cases of Pertussis (whooping cough) in school aged children this 2024 respiratory season. Lincoln County has had 3 confirmed and 3 probable cases, Flathead County has also seen a rise in pertussis activity with 10 reported cases since November. Jessica Lopeman from Montana DPHHS, notes that during the Covid-19 pandemic Montana's pertussis numbers declined drastically. This year has been the first year we have returned to pre-pandemic levels of pertussis cases. Historically every 3-5 years pertussis cases have a large surge in the US, per CDC. Lincoln County Health Department wants to alert providers to watch for pertussis-like illness and test and treat accordingly. Timely testing and reporting will allow the Health Department to promptly initiate contact investigations to mitigate further spread to the community.

The Health Department would like to provide the following reminders:

1) SUSPECT:

- Have increased suspicion for pertussis infection among persons presenting with prolonged cough.
- Vaccinated persons may have less severe illness but still require testing and treatment.

2) TEST:

- PCR testing for pertussis is readily accessible. Most healthcare facilities have testing onsite or through their usual testing partners. Testing is also available from the Montana Public Health Laboratory.

3) TREAT:

- If you suspect pertussis, presumptively treat with antibiotics while waiting for testing result.

Patients should remain home from school, daycare, or work for 5 days after initiation of appropriate antibiotics or 21 days from cough onset for untreated infections (or until a reasonable alternative diagnosis has been determined).

- If a close contact becomes symptomatic, it is essential that they be tested for pertussis so prompt follow-up can be conducted by the Health Department.

4) PREVENT:

- All household contacts should receive antibiotics as post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent illness, regardless of vaccination status. Secondary rates of pertussis infection among household members are high even among vaccinated individuals.
- Additional close contacts outside the household setting may be advised to receive PEP, specifically if they have a health condition that may be made worse with pertussis, such as asthma, or are immunocompromised. Additionally, contacts outside the household may be recommended for PEP if they live with- or have frequent contact with the following people:
 - A woman who is pregnant
 - A baby younger than 12 months old
 - Anyone with health conditions that may be worse with whooping cough, such as asthma, or other immune compromising diseases.
- Vaccinate any well persons who are not up to date with their pertussis vaccination. Both DTaP and Tdap are effective and safe.

5) REPORT:

- Confirmed and suspected cases of pertussis are immediately reportable to the Health Department, regardless of whether testing was ordered. Under the Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM) 37.114.201 and 37.114.203, pertussis is a reportable illness, even if it is considered a suspect case.
- The Health Department investigates all potential pertussis exposures to determine the extent of exposure that occurred and identify close contacts. The Health Department will work with schools to notify classroom contacts with general pertussis exposure information and convey the PEP recommendations that are listed above.

For any questions or to report suspect cases, contact Lincoln County Health Department at:

Communicable Disease Program: During business hours: (406) 283-2467

Emergency After hours: (406)-293-4112

Communicable Disease Fax: 1-406-283-2466

