

PRESS RELEASE

# Health Alert

October 2nd, 2024



Whitman County  
Public Health

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Pertussis Activity in Whitman County

Questions regarding this information may be directed to the following contacts:

**Whitman County Public Health**

**Disease Prevention Program**

DiseasePrevention@whitmancounty.gov

Whitman County Public Health (WCPH), in partnership with Environmental Health & Safety Services at WSU and Cougar Health Services, is investigating a pertussis outbreak within the WSU student population. There are five cases identified as of 10/1/2024.

### Alert Categories



#### Health Alert

Conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.



#### Health Advisory

Provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.



#### Health Update

Provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.

### Summary

Five individuals in Whitman County as of 10/1/2024 have been diagnosed with a confirmed case of B. pertussis.

We are asking all current cases to isolate until they have completed their 5-day course of antibiotics prescribed by their provider. Additionally, we are recommending all close contacts to these cases reach out to their provider to discuss preventive antibiotics, also known as postexposure prophylaxis (PEP).

While all available information leads Whitman County Public Health to believe the outbreak is currently contained within WSU's student population, we encourage all residents to take the preventive measures below.

## Requested Actions

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1. Be aware of pertussis potentially circulating in the community.
2. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have been exposed to pertussis.
3. Anyone who is not up to date on their pertussis vaccination schedule should seek care with their healthcare provider to update their immunization status.
4. Practice good hand, mouth, and nose hygiene.
  - a. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw away used tissues right away and wash your hands.
  - b. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
5. Stay home when sick and limit your exposure to people who are sick.

## What is Pertussis?

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Pertussis (whooping cough) is a well-known and serious respiratory illness caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.

## How is Pertussis Spread?

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Person-to-person spread of pertussis occurs through large respiratory droplets and is most likely among people who live together or people who spend time together indoors.

## What are the Symptoms of Pertussis?

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It begins with cold-like symptoms and develops into a bad cough.

Coughing spells can be severe, sometimes ending in gagging or vomiting. Some kids also may have a high-pitched “whoop” after they cough, which is how the disease got its common name. However, infants may not cough at all, and some teens and adults don’t have a “whoop” after they cough).

Complications of pertussis include pneumonia, syncope (passing out), seizures, apnea (stopping breathing), and death. These severe complications are most common in infants.

## Who is at High Risk for Pertussis?

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People at high risk for pertussis:

- Infants under 1 year old, who are at greatest risk for severe disease and death
- Pregnant people in the last trimester, who may expose infants
- Healthcare workers with direct patient contact, who may expose infants, pregnant persons, or others who have contact with infants or pregnant persons
- Anyone who may expose infants under 1 year old or pregnant persons
  - e.g., childbirth educators, childcare workers, members of a household with infants

## Pertussis Prevention

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### **Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent pertussis.**

- DTaP Vaccine: For infants and young children, this vaccine is given in a series of five doses (at 2, 4, 6, 15–18 months, and 4–6 years).
- Tdap Booster: Adolescents (11–12 years old), pregnant women, and adults should receive the Tdap booster, which provides continued protection against pertussis.
- Pregnancy Vaccination: Pregnant women are advised to receive the Tdap vaccine during the third trimester (between 27 and 36 weeks of pregnancy) to protect newborns before they can receive their own vaccinations.
- Close Contacts: Vaccinating family members and caregivers (cocooning) of young infants is another way to prevent pertussis from spreading to vulnerable babies.

Pertussis vaccines are effective, but not perfect. They typically offer good levels of protection within the first two years after getting the vaccine, but protection wanes over time. In general, DTaP vaccines are 80% to 90% effective.

### **Practice good hand, mouth, and nose hygiene.**

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw away used tissues in the wastebasket right away.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

### **Limit your exposure to people who are sick.**

- If someone has pertussis, they should isolate, particularly from vulnerable individuals (such as infants or the elderly), until they have been treated with antibiotics for 5 days or 21 days have passed since symptoms began.

## Pertussis Testing

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There are tests available for Pertussis.

However, a negative test does not mean a person should stop treatment. The full prescription should be taken as directed by your care provider.

## Pertussis Treatment

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If pertussis is diagnosed, early treatment with antibiotics can reduce the spread of the disease to others. Close contacts of someone with pertussis may also be prescribed preventive antibiotics.

Infected individuals should stay home and avoid contact with others until they have completed at least 5 days of antibiotic treatment or stay home for 21 days after the onset of symptoms to avoid spreading the infection.