



Public Health
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September 19, 2023

Dear Education and Early Learning and Child Care Partner:

Manitoba Health declared an outbreak of pertussis (whooping cough) in the Southern Health – Santé Sud region on June 26, 2023. As of September 18, 2023 there were 283 confirmed or probable cases reported to Manitoba Health since January 2023, with 272 of the cases reported from Southern Health-Santé Sud.

Whooping cough is a highly contagious, vaccine-preventable illness. It is caused by bacteria, usually spread through respiratory droplets in the air when coughing or sneezing, and is most contagious during the initial stages of illness. Symptoms usually show up seven to 10 days after being exposed.

The illness often starts with a mild fever, runny nose and a cough. It can lead to serious coughing fits that can last for one to 10 weeks. The coughing fits may cause difficulty breathing, choking and vomiting. Infants may also have poor feeding.

Whooping cough can affect people of all ages, but infants aged one year or younger are at greatest risk of severe complications, including pauses in breathing, pneumonia, seizures, brain swelling and death. Pregnant people in their third trimester are also at higher risk.

Public health officials recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted routine health care, including immunizations. The vaccines that protect against whooping cough are part of Manitoba's recommended routine childhood immunization schedule and school immunization schedule. Children should be immunized at two, four, six and 18 months, once more between the ages of four and six and again in grade 8 or 9.

Recommended Immunization Schedules can be found at:
www.manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/div/schedules.html

Please review and share the listed factsheets with the staff, parents/guardians, students and children in your school or child care facility, as appropriate:

- manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/factsheets/daptphib.pdf
- manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/factsheets/tdapipv.pdf

Proper cough etiquette and hand hygiene, as well as cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting routines are also important ways to prevent the spread of infection. We strongly encourage you to continue practicing and promoting infection prevention and control, including providing age appropriate messaging about cough etiquette and hand hygiene.

Remember that it is important to:

- provide information to parents/guardians about what symptoms they should be looking for in their child;
- ask parents/guardians and staff to check their immunization records to ensure they are up-to-date on all recommended pertussis vaccine doses, and talk to their primary care provider if needed;
- share Manitoba Health's recommended immunization schedules manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/cdc/div/schedules.html;
- work with public health to notify families and staff if there is a diagnosed case of pertussis in your school or child care facility as appropriate; and
- if a student, child or staff in your school or child care facility has symptoms of a respiratory illness, it is important to follow the direction provided within your guidelines and/ or policies. Spread of respiratory illnesses may be decreased by limiting exposure to others. An individual who is ill may be offered a medical face mask as an additional measure to assist in preventing potential exposure to others until they are able to leave the school or child care facility.

People who have symptoms of whooping cough should contact their health care provider. Infected individuals may be prescribed antibiotics and should stay home and avoid close contact with others until treatment is completed. This can help prevent further spread of infection. Contacts to cases of pertussis may also be prescribed antibiotics to prevent them from developing the disease.

For more information on pertussis or vaccinations, talk to your primary care provider or public health nurse, call Health Links-Info Santé at 204-788-8200 or 1-888-315-9257 (toll-free), or visit the Manitoba Health website at manitoba.ca/health/publichealth/diseases/pertussis.html.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

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Original signed by

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