



MEDIA ADVISORY: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Information from:
Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment**



Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Cases Rising in Barnstable County

Whooping cough cases are increasing locally, statewide and nationally prompting health officials to emphasize the need for awareness and prevention.

December 17, 2024 (Barnstable, MA) – Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment is urging residents to take precautions as cases of pertussis, also known as whooping cough, continue to rise locally, statewide, and nationally. To date, there have been 26 cases of pertussis reported in Barnstable County this year, including the hospitalization of one young child.

“This is the worst year for pertussis in Barnstable County in a decade,” states Barnstable County Contract Epidemiologist Lea Hamner. “Nationally, pertussis cases are six-times higher than last year, with the largest number of cases in adolescents. People need to be aware that pertussis is circulating this holiday season. Pertussis can be life threatening for young infants.” Hamner urges residents to know the signs and symptoms of pertussis, as well as how to prevent the disease.

Pertussis is a contagious respiratory illness caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*. Early symptoms can resemble a mild cold, starting with a persistent runny nose and sneezing, low grade fever, sore throat, and a mild occasional cough that can worsen into coughing fits after 1 to 2 weeks. These coughing fits come on suddenly and can be severe, sometimes causing people to vomit, turn red, turn blue, or “whoop” as they try to catch their breath, hence the commonly used term “whooping cough”. These severe symptoms may not occur in vaccinated individuals.

Early Antibiotic Treatment Stops Infectiousness and Further Spread of Pertussis

Pertussis is highly infectious early on, beginning when mild cold symptoms first appear and lasting up to 21 days after the cough begins. However, early antibiotic treatment for 5 days halts infectiousness and can mitigate symptoms. It is crucial to recognize and address pertussis early to prevent further spread.

Anyone Experiencing Symptoms of Pertussis Should:

- **Get Tested:** Anyone who experiences symptoms of pertussis should ask their doctor about testing. Likewise, anyone receiving tests for COVID-19, flu, or RSV, should ask their doctor to include pertussis testing.
- **Get Treated:** If an early pertussis diagnosis is made (within 21 days of the start of a cough), it is important to receive a five-day course of antibiotic treatment. Early treatment can reduce the severity of symptoms and stop the spread of pertussis to others.
- **Stay Home:** After five days of antibiotic treatment, pertussis is no longer contagious. People being treated with antibiotics can therefore return to school or work on day six of treatment. Without antibiotic treatment however, anyone who tests positive for pertussis should stay home from work, school, or childcare for 21 days, starting with the day the cough first appeared.
- **Inform Close Contacts:** Anyone who tests positive for pertussis should notify close contacts. Close contacts include those who have been exposed to the saliva/mucus of an infected, symptomatic individual through coughing, sneezing, kissing, sharing food/beverages/cigarettes/vapes. Close contacts should consult their doctor about taking preventive antibiotics (also called post-exposure prophylaxis). This is especially important for exposed babies, pregnant people, and people with chronic respiratory or immunocompromising conditions. People who may have been exposed to pertussis but are symptom-free do not need to stay home unless they become symptomatic.

How to Prevent Pertussis:

- **It is important for families to stay up to date with pertussis vaccines.** Vaccination is the best protection against pertussis. Protection from vaccination can wane over time, so ensure you have had your most recent recommended vaccination.
- **Respiratory diseases are preventable.** Taking steps to prevent pertussis also helps protect from respiratory infections like flu, mycoplasma pneumonia, RSV, and COVID-19. Up-to-date vaccinations, frequent hand washing, coughing/sneezing into an elbow, cleaning and disinfecting frequently used items, maintaining good airflow in the home or office, opting to mask or physically distance from others, and staying home when sick are all important ways to prevent the spread of pertussis.

The Barnstable County Department of Health and Environment emphasizes the importance of protecting yourself and your community by recognizing pertussis symptoms, seeking medical advice promptly, and following treatment recommendations. For additional resources and updates, visit our [website](#) or contact us directly at (774) 330-3001.

Pertussis Information and Resources:

- [Pertussis Fact Sheet | Mass.gov](#)
- [Pertussis Vaccination Recommendations | Whooping Cough | CDC](#)
- [Pertussis \(Whooping Cough\) on the Cape & Islands - Barnstable County](#)
- [Acute Respiratory Illness on the Cape & Islands - Barnstable County](#)
- [Massachusetts Department of Public Health Pertussis Advisory 11-8-2024](#)
- [Massachusetts Department of Public Health Pertussis Advisory 8-20-2024](#)

ABOUT BARNSTABLE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT

Established under a Special Act of the Legislature in 1926, the Barnstable County Department of Health & Environment (BCDHE) provides regional public health and environmental health services throughout the 15 towns comprising Barnstable County. The Department manages several environmental, public health, and homeland security grants funded through state and federal resources. The Department's primary mission is to protect public health and the environment and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of Barnstable County residents.

MEDIA CONTACT: Bethany Traverse, Health Communications Coordinator,
bethany.traverse@barnstablecounty.org

###