

Pertussis in Schools

Suspect pertussis in school?

If you become aware of a suspected or confirmed case of pertussis in students or staff member in your school, notify public health officials within one business day.

- [Reporting Pertussis \(Bordetella pertussis\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/pertussis/hcp/report.html)
(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/pertussis/hcp/report.html)
 - [Vaccine Preventable Disease \(VPD\) Reporting Form](https://redcap.health.state.mn.us/redcap/surveys/?s=WTLE8NA7FYFFCE8)
(<https://redcap.health.state.mn.us/redcap/surveys/?s=WTLE8NA7FYFFCE8>).
 - 651-201-5414 or 877-676-5414

Public health investigators will contact the person's health care provider to determine whether a diagnosis of pertussis is confirmed. They will also call the person who was diagnosed with pertussis to get more information about their symptoms and people they may have exposed.

They will work with you and the patient (or parent/guardian) to determine what steps are needed for responding to pertussis at your facility and on your campus. Public health will work with you to address questions and concerns, plan appropriate notifications, and implement prevention and control measures, as needed.

Generally, public health will work with you and the case to determine if there have been any close contact exposures where we would recommend doing a notification letter to a specific setting, recommend post-exposure prophylaxis, or in some situations, a general notification to campus.

Action steps for schools

- Be aware of symptoms and consider pertussis in any student or staff member who has a cough lasting more than two weeks or a severe cough that occurs in sudden, uncontrollable bursts, especially if followed by vomiting.
- Encourage an evaluation by a health care provider if you suspect a student or staff person may have pertussis.
- If several cases of pertussis are identified in your school, the threshold for symptoms of concern can also include:
 - A cough illness lasting at least seven days, or
 - A cough illness of any duration if a known close exposure has occurred.

When should students with pertussis be excluded from school?

- Exclude students from school only if necessary.
- Those who have been diagnosed with pertussis should do the following until completion of five full days of appropriate antibiotics or until 21 days have passed since cough onset:
 - Abstain from any sort of work, social activities, sports, or in person classes.

- Additional guidance on when to consider exclusion for pertussis can be found at [Pertussis: School and Activities Exclusion Recommendations \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/pertussis/school/schoolexcl.pdf\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/pertussis/school/schoolexcl.pdf).

Should we exclude students who have been exposed but don't have symptoms?

No. Pertussis is mostly spread only when someone starts coughing. Even if a student has been exposed, if they don't have a cough, they can attend school.

Should we ever close school due to pertussis?

No. We do not recommend closing schools due to outbreaks of pertussis. There is no evidence that it prevents the spread of disease, as students may gather in other settings.

What to expect when a case of pertussis is confirmed in your school

Public health will collaborate with you on steps to take to determine when and what kind of response strategies are needed.

- Identify who is exposed:
 - Public health prevention and control measures focus on close contacts because pertussis spreads by heavier droplets coughed into the air. In general, persons are considered close contacts if they:
 - Are within three feet of someone with pertussis for at least 10 hours a week.
 - Have direct face-to-face contact with someone with pertussis while they are coughing.
 - Have been in a small, confined space with someone for more than an hour while they were coughing (long car ride, small conference room, piano lessons, etc.)
 - In academic settings, this usually means that close contacts are identified in small to mid-sized classroom, an activity, a lab, a sport, or a club.
 - Sometimes the exposure may be considered broader if there are a lot of cases across multiple different grades or academic tracks.
- Notify and making recommendations for those who are exposed:
 - Initial notifications in an academic setting are mostly recommended only if a case of pertussis is either laboratory confirmed or have been clinically diagnosed by a health care provider or public health.
 - Public health has template letters they can share for a variety of situations, in a variety of languages.
 - This includes letters just for the classroom when there is only one or two cases, letters for the classroom when there are three or more cases, and letters for schools to promote general awareness.

- Public health also has a variety of posters.
- Generally, public health does not recommend antibiotics for those who have been exposed in a classroom or activity setting.
 - Preventive antibiotics (or post-exposure prophylaxis) are limited to those who are household-like contacts or overnight guests of a case while they were infectious.
 - More on when antibiotics are recommended can be found at [Pertussis Treatment and Prophylaxis \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/pertussis/hcp/treatment.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/pertussis/hcp/treatment.html).

Other action steps to consider

- Maintain a line list to track case trends in your school.
- Check school vaccination records for pertussis.
- Remind parents about the importance of keeping their younger children up to date on the DTaP vaccine series.
- Promote Tdap vaccine for adolescents and adults, including school staff, teachers, and coaches.
 - People who are pregnant should receive a Tdap at every pregnancy.

If you have questions or concerns, contact MDH at 651-201-5414 or 877-676-5414 or find more resources at [Pertussis \(Whooping Cough\) \(www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/pertussis/index.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/pertussis/index.html).

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To obtain this information in a different format, call: 651-201-5414.