

# Healthcare Providers

## Pertussis Epidemic in Washtenaw County

There is a pertussis epidemic in Washtenaw County—with 233 cases in 2010 (compared to 23 cases in 2008 and 84 cases in 2009).

### Think Pertussis

- Pertussis is difficult to diagnose. The initial symptoms are similar to that of a cold and can be mild. After 1-2 weeks there is progression to a paroxysmal cough which may be followed by an inspiratory whoop, post-tussive vomiting or respiratory difficulty. Coughing can persist for months, and many cases report an “unusual” cough. A history of immunization does not rule out the possibility of pertussis.
- **Young infants:** Diagnosis is often delayed or missed because of a deceptively mild onset of runny nose. There usually is no fever. Cough may be undetectable or mild. Illness may present as apnea, hypoxia or seizures. Mild illness may suddenly transform into respiratory distress.
- **Adolescents and adults:** Most cases are not diagnosed. A misdiagnosis of bronchitis or asthma is common. The patient may report episodes of a choking sensation or vomiting after coughing. Adolescents and adults can develop severe disease.

### Test

Delays in recognition of pertussis may contribute to adverse clinical outcomes. If pertussis is suspected obtain a nasal aspirate or nasopharyngeal swab for PCR.

### Treat

Delays in treatment may increase the risk of fatal illness. Pertussis may progress rapidly in young infants. Treat all suspect and confirmed cases promptly with azithromycin and isolate at home until five days of antibiotics are completed. Post exposure prophylaxis of close contacts regardless of immunization status is recommended.

### Reduce Transmission

Pertussis is a reportable disease. Report suspected and confirmed cases of pertussis promptly to Public Health at 734-544-6700. Prompt reporting will support prevention and control efforts.

### Prevent Pertussis

- Assess immunization status in children and adults, and use every patient encounter to vaccinate. All infant contacts and all health care workers should be immunized with Tdap or DTaP vaccine, as age appropriate.
- Vaccinate for pertussis at the earliest opportunity, especially during postpartum hospitalization and at clinic visits for wound management, checkups or acute care.

Washtenaw County Public Health  
555 Towner St. Ypsilanti, MI 48198  
734-544-6700  
<http://publichealth.ewashtenaw.org>

