

**From:** Dr. Janice Fitzgerald, Chief Medical Officer of Health

**To:** Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, and Other Health Care Providers

**Re:** *Bordetella pertussis* Testing and Prevention

**Date:** May 10, 2024

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The Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS) continues to monitor an increase in cases of pertussis (whooping cough) throughout the province, including an outbreak of Pertussis in the Eastern Zones of NL Health Services. DHCS is advising health care providers to be on the alert for pertussis.

Pertussis is a [notifiable disease](#) and should be reported in writing within 24 hours of laboratory or clinical diagnosis. The clinical course of pertussis and provincial immunization program is described in the April 11<sup>th</sup> CMOH memo: [Update on Pertussis](#).

Pregnant individuals are eligible for pertussis vaccination (Tdap) between 27-32 weeks gestation of every pregnancy. Individuals who need pertussis vaccination should contact their local public health unit which can be found on zones website: [Eastern Zones](#), [Central](#), [Labrador-Grenfell](#) and [Western](#).

Diagnosis is made through real-time PCR to detect *Bordetella pertussis* DNA in a nasopharyngeal (NP) swab, and requires the same container and method as for respiratory virus PCR (see the [Public Health Laboratory memo on respiratory virus testing](#) for reference). **Please specify “Pertussis PCR” on the lab requisition.** The collection containers (UTM with NP swabs) are available to primary care providers from the Public Health Microbiology Laboratory (PHML) store. **Orders may be placed by phone call at 709-777-7123 or 709-777-6415, or by faxing to 709-777-6362.**

The optimal sensitivity for *B. pertussis* DNA PCR is during the first 3 weeks of cough. After four weeks, the amount of bacterial DNA in the NP rapidly diminishes, which increases the risk of a false-negative result. PCR testing is not recommended for asymptomatic patients because false-positive results are more likely in asymptomatic individuals. Asymptomatic close contacts of confirmed cases should not be tested and testing of contacts should not be used for determining post-exposure chemoprophylaxis eligibility.

**NLHS has set up a testing clinic that will be available starting May 9, 2024, at 50 Mundy Pond Road, St. John’s, NL. Testing will be arranged for individuals who are experiencing symptoms of pertussis AND have been in contact with someone who has whooping cough. Testing will be by appointment only and arrangements can be made by calling 709-752-7852 or texting 1-877-709-0512.**

Macrolide antibiotics are used to treat pertussis and for post-exposure chemoprophylaxis. Antibiotic treatment is most effective during the catarrhal stage. After the paroxysmal stage begins, treatment will not reduce symptom duration but can shorten the period of



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communicability. After three weeks of the paroxysmal stage, treatment is not effective for symptoms and does not reduce communicability.

NLHS Public Health will contact individuals identified as contacts of a confirmed case to assess eligibility for chemoprophylaxis. Chemoprophylaxis is recommended for infants less than one year old and pregnant individuals in their third trimester, regardless of vaccination history, if exposed within 21 days of cough onset in the case.