



September 10, 2024

Dear School Community, Parents and Guardians,

With the start of a new school year, Public Health would like to advise that pertussis continues to circulate in our communities. It is therefore important to be on the lookout for symptoms and follow public health recommendations to protect yourself and those around you.

FACTS ABOUT PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH)

Pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, is a highly contagious respiratory illness, caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*. It is spread easily through droplets in the air from coughing or sneezing by infected people. Symptoms usually develop within 5 to 10 days after exposure, but sometimes do not develop for as long as three weeks. Whooping cough typically begins with cold-like symptoms and a cough that worsens over one to two weeks. Coughing may occur in fits followed by a “whooping” noise, vomiting, cyanosis (turning blue) or the inability to catch one’s breath. Coughing may be worse at night and can last one to six weeks.

While many cases of whooping cough are mild, it can sometimes cause severe illness. Infants and individuals who are pregnant in the third trimester are most at risk. The more whooping cough circulates, the greater the likelihood that an at-risk child will be exposed to the bacteria. This is why it is so important to stay home when sick, get tested if you think you have symptoms of pertussis, and ensure that your immunizations are up to date.

PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

Antibiotics can prevent the spread of whooping cough and are recommended for individuals diagnosed with the infection and close contacts who are considered high risk. **These include babies less than one year of age and pregnant women in their third trimester.**

You can also protect yourselves and others in your community through good health habits such as cover, clean, contain – use a tissue or your arm to cover coughs and sneezes; clean your hands regularly with soap and water or hand sanitizer; and contain your illness by staying home when you are sick and wearing a mask as needed.

The vaccines that protect against whooping cough are part of Newfoundland and Labrador’s recommended routine childhood immunization schedule and school immunization schedules. A booster dose of the vaccine (Tdap) is also recommended for adults once in adulthood, and for pregnant women during each pregnancy.

If you are unsure if you are up to date with whooping cough vaccine, or need to arrange immunization, individuals in the [Eastern Urban and Rural](#) zones may contact your local public health nursing office or call 1-877-752-8171.

Individuals in the Central, Labrador-Grenfell and Western Zones who have questions about pertussis booster/Tdap vaccine availability are asked to call their local public health clinic/community health office. For contact information, please refer to your zone’s website: [Central](#), [Labrador-Grenfell](#) and [Western](#).