
Dear Parent/Guardian,

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) has reported a significant statewide increase in cases of pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough. Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory tract infection spread by coughing and sneezing. It affects people of all ages, but it is more likely to be severe and possibly deadly for babies and individuals with chronic illnesses.

Recent increase in cases: As of November 2024, 869 pertussis cases have been reported statewide, a 31% increase from previous years. In Kent County, 17 cases of pertussis have been reported in 2024, with most of these cases coinciding with the school year. Of these 17 individuals, 12 are children. A total of 5 individuals have needed hospitalization including 2 children.

Symptoms: Symptoms of pertussis, such as coughing, can take 5 to 10 days to appear after exposure and sometimes longer. Infants and young children may not cough, but they may have pauses in their breathing (apnea), which can cause shortness of breath and a blue tint to their skin color. Later symptoms may consist of uncontrolled coughing fits. Any children with symptoms of pertussis (i.e., cough) should stay home from school and visit a doctor to be tested, even if they have been vaccinated. Children diagnosed with pertussis should be excluded from school until they have completed 5 days of antibiotic treatment.

Prevention: Vaccinations are the best form of defense against the spread of pertussis. The pertussis vaccine is recommended for infants, children, adolescents, people who are pregnant, and unvaccinated adults. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a routine DTaP vaccine series for infants and young children and a single dose of Tdap for adolescents 11 to 12 years old. People who are pregnant should receive a Tdap vaccine during pregnancy. To schedule a vaccine at the Kent County Health Department (KCHD), please call 616-632-7200.

If you or your child have been in close contact with an individual diagnosed with pertussis, you should call your doctor to discuss starting antibiotic treatment to prevent illness. You may also call the KCHD Communicable Disease Unit at 616-632-7228 with additional questions. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Cathy Armstrong, BSN, RN
Program Supervisor, Communicable Disease Unit
Kent County Health Department