



Pertussis (Whooping Cough) in Schools

Fact sheet for school health personnel on pertussis in school-aged children.

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a disease that affects the lungs. It is caused by a bacteria that can be spread through the air. Anyone of any age can get pertussis. A person with pertussis develops a severe cough that usually lasts four to six weeks or longer.

Suspect pertussis in school?

If you become aware of a suspected or confirmed case of pertussis in a child or staff member in your school, notify public health officials as soon as possible.

Public health investigators will contact the person's health care provider to determine whether a diagnosis of pertussis is confirmed. They will also work with you and the patient (or parent/guardian) to address questions and concerns, plan appropriate notifications, and implement prevention and control measures, as needed.

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.
- Report all suspected or confirmed cases of pertussis to the Alaska Section of Epidemiology (AK-SOE) at 907-269-8000.

When should students with pertussis be excluded from school?

Exclude students from school only if necessary.

See [Pertussis: School, Child Care, Team Sports, and Other Organized Activity Exclusion Recommendations](#) for additional information.

(<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/SiteAssets/Pages/Pertussis/PertussisSchoolExclusion.pdf>) for additional guidance.

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 congregate in other settings.

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

Public health will collaborate with you to:

- Identify high-risk close contacts of the case which may include those who are pregnant or persons with pre-existing health conditions that may be exacerbated by a pertussis infection (e.g., immunocompromised persons or persons with moderate to severe asthma). In general, persons are considered close contacts if they:
 - Are within 3 feet of someone with pertussis for at least 10 hours a week or,
 - Have direct face-to-face contact with someone with pertussis.

Note: If several cases of pertussis are identified in your school the threshold for symptoms of concern changes a bit and includes:

- A cough illness lasting at least seven days or,
- A cough illness of any duration if a known close exposure has occurred.

Inform others in your school and community about pertussis -- especially if pertussis in the school generates a lot of questions and concerns or if a cluster or outbreak of cases occurs. Public health will also notify the medical community.

Promote Tdap vaccine for adolescents and adults, including school staff, teachers and coaches, particularly in the event of an outbreak.

Remind parents about the importance of keeping their younger children up-to-date on the DTaP series.

If you have questions or concerns, contact AK-SOE at 907-269-8000 or see [Pertussis \(whooping cough\)](#) (<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Epi/id/Pages/dod/pertussis/pertussis.aspx>)

Fact sheet adapted from Minnesota Department of Health, July 2017.
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/pertussis/school/schoolfacts.pdf>