



Media Release

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Increase in pertussis cases underscores importance of staying up to date on publicly funded vaccinations

With cases of pertussis (whooping cough) on the rise in Ontario, including locally, Grey Bruce Public Health is reminding people that staying up to date on routine vaccinations is the best defence against the highly contagious bacterial respiratory infection.

In the first seven months of 2024, Public Health has been notified of 16 confirmed or probable cases of pertussis in Grey-Bruce. Typically, three to four cases of the infection are reported in Grey-Bruce annually.

In Ontario, 431 probable or confirmed cases of pertussis were reported to Public Health Units in the first six months of 2024. That compares to 369 cases over the same period in 2023 and 162 cases in the first six months of 2022.

While pertussis can affect people of all ages, it is most dangerous to infants who are at highest risk of pertussis-associated complications and are too young to be protected by a complete vaccine series.

“This is why it’s important for all eligible individuals to ensure they are up-to-date on pertussis-containing vaccines — adequate vaccination not only protects you from this infection, but it also helps to safeguard the most vulnerable members of our communities,” says Monica Blair, Manager of Public Health’s Vaccine Preventable Diseases Program.

According to Ontario’s publicly funded routine immunization schedule, people should get vaccinated against pertussis several times during childhood, again during their teen years, while pregnant, and in adulthood.

Publicly funded vaccines are available and recommended at:

- Two, four, six, and 18 months of age;
- Between 4-6 years of age;

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- Between 14-16 years of age;
- Once in adulthood (before age 65); and
- Once in each pregnancy – ideally from 27 to 32 weeks gestation, but the vaccine can be given at any time during the pregnancy.

Pertussis, an infection of the lungs and airways, is an endemic disease in Ontario characterized by low-level activity and occasional cyclical increases every two to six years, according to [Public Health Ontario](#). Pertussis is underdiagnosed and underreported in Ontario and is a common and often unrecognized cause of persistent cough in adolescents and adults.

The infection is caused by a bacteria called *bordetella pertussis*, which is spread easily through droplets in the air from coughing or sneezing by an infected person. Pertussis is most contagious during the first two weeks after coughing starts.

The [first symptoms](#) of pertussis may begin seven to 10 days after being infected with the bacteria, but could appear up to 28 days after infection. Pertussis starts out with a mild fever, runny nose, red watery eyes, and a cough. It can lead to serious coughing fits that can last for several weeks. The coughing fits may cause difficulty breathing, choking, and vomiting.

For older children and adults, pertussis symptoms may be less severe and may appear as cold-like symptoms with a constant cough that lasts longer than a week. In some cases, pertussis can lead to complications like pneumonia.

Pertussis is usually treated with antibiotics.

Pertussis-containing vaccines are available through primary care providers. For those without a primary care provider or who face barriers in getting an appointment, Grey Bruce Public Health offers clinics for routine vaccines [biweekly in Owen Sound and monthly in Walkerton](#). Call GBPH's Vaccine Preventable Diseases team at 519-376-9420 ext. 2 to book an appointment.

For More Information:

To connect with the Medical Officer of Health or the program manager, please contact: Denis Langlois, Communications Co-ordinator, Grey Bruce Public Health, 519-376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456 ext. 1315, Communications@publichealthgreybruce.on.ca