



November 19, 2024

Dear Colleague:

Pertussis (whooping cough) is a common respiratory illness with peaks in case counts occurring every few years. We are seeing a sharp increase in the number of cases nationwide and within our state. In Arkansas, the number of cases in 2024 has increased at least fivefold compared to 2023.

As of November 19, 2024, there have been over 200 cases in Arkansas, which is the highest number of reported cases between 2018 to 2023. Almost half of the counties in Arkansas have reported at least one case of pertussis. The majority of cases have occurred in school age children and teenagers. Most cases have received at least one dose of a pertussis vaccine.

Teens and adults diagnosed with pertussis, especially those who have been vaccinated, often have less severe symptoms and/or complications. However, these groups can transmit pertussis to high-risk groups. Infants less than 12 months old who have been diagnosed with pertussis can have severe complications. Approximately one third of infants diagnosed with pertussis require hospitalization in the United States. As of November 19, 2024, approximately five percent of pertussis cases in Arkansas have been diagnosed in infants less than 12 months old; however, this group accounts for about half of hospitalizations due to pertussis this year.

Prevention of severe pertussis in high-risk populations requires a two-pronged approach focused on vaccination and post-exposure prophylaxis for high-risk groups and people around them. Vaccines that provide protection against pertussis include DTaP (for children less than 7 years old) and Tdap (for older children and adults).

CDC Pertussis Vaccination Recommendations

Administer a **5-dose DTaP series**, 1 dose at each of the following ages:

- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- 15 through 18 months
- 4 through 6 years

Administer a **single dose of Tdap** at 11 to 12 years of age.

Give a single dose of **Tdap during every pregnancy**, preferably during the early part of gestational weeks 27 through 36.

Adults who have never received a dose of **Tdap** should receive a single dose of **Tdap**. While there is no recommendation for booster doses against pertussis, immunity to pertussis does wane a few years following vaccination. Adults do need booster doses every 10 years to maintain protection against diphtheria and tetanus. Health care providers can administer either Td or **Tdap** in this situation. A dose of **Tdap** will provide additional coverage for pertussis.

CDC Post-Exposure Antimicrobial Prophylaxis (PEP) Recommendations

The CDC recommends PEP for all household contacts and other close contacts that are personally at high risk or will have contact with high-risk individuals.

People at high risk include:

- Infants under 12 months of age
- Persons with pre-existing health conditions that may be exacerbated by a pertussis infection.

People who will have contact with others at high risk of developing severe pertussis include:

- Pregnant women in their third trimester
- All people in high-risk settings (neonatal intensive care units, childcare settings, maternity wards).

For more information and resources on pertussis, please visit the [CDC website on pertussis](#) or the [ADH website](#). On the ADH website, under the health care provider section, you can find a two-page document intended to be a quick reference on pertussis. If a consultation is needed, health care providers can call or email adh.opr@arkansas.gov. For unusual cases or cluster information, call 1-501-661-2381 during normal business hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. CST Monday through Friday. Call 1-800-554-5738 outside of normal business hours.

Sincerely,

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