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Pertussis in Schools

Suspect pertussis in school?

If you become aware of a suspect or confirmed case of pertussis in students or staff members in your school, notify the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH) within 24 hours.

How to report:

Fax a disease report to 1-501-661-2428. The Communicable Disease Reporting Form is available on the ADH website and can be accessed directly [here](#).

ADH will contact the person who was diagnosed with pertussis to get more information about their symptoms, risk factors, and people they may have exposed.

ADH will work with you and the patient (or parent/guardian) to determine what steps are needed for responding to pertussis at your facility and on your campus. Additionally, ADH will work with you to address questions and concerns, plan appropriate notifications, and implement prevention and control measures, as needed.

Generally, ADH will work with you and the person with pertussis to determine if there have been any close contact exposures where a notification letter or in some situations, a general notification to campus is recommended.

Considerations:

- Be aware of symptoms and consider pertussis in anyone who has a cough lasting more than two weeks or has 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 someone may have pertussis.
- If several cases of pertussis are identified in your school, the threshold for symptoms of concern can include:
 - A cough illness lasting at least seven days, or
 - A cough illness of any duration if a known close exposure has occurred or during periods of high community transmission.

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

ADH will collaborate with you on steps to take to determine when and what kind of response strategies are needed.

- Identify who is exposed:
 - Public health prevention and control measures focus on close contacts because pertussis spreads by droplets coughed into the air. In general, persons are considered close contacts if they:
 - Are within three to six feet of a suspected or confirmed case of pertussis and have been exposed for more than 30 minutes.
 - In academic settings, close contacts are identified in a small to mid-sized classroom, an activity, a lab, a sport, or a club.
 - Sometimes the exposure may be considered broader if there are many cases across multiple grades or academic tracks.
- Notify and make recommendations for those who are exposed:
 - Initial notifications in an academic setting are mostly recommended only if a case of pertussis is either laboratory confirmed or have been clinically diagnosed by a health care provider or public health.
 - Public health has template letters they can share for various situations, in various languages, including Spanish and Marshallese.

Other action steps to consider:

- Maintain a line list to track case trends in your school
 - Consider including name, date of birth, race and ethnicity, sex, vaccine status, date of last dose of pertussis vaccine received, and total number of doses of pertussis vaccine(s) received
- Check school vaccination records for pertussis
- Remind parents about the importance of keeping their children up to date on the appropriate vaccine series.
- Promote Tdap vaccine for adolescents and adults, including school staff, teachers, and coaches.
 - Women who are pregnant should receive a Tdap during every pregnancy.

If you have questions or concerns, contact the Arkansas Department of Health Outbreak Prevention and Response branch at 501-661-2381 during normal business hours (8:00 am to 4:30 pm CST Monday through Friday). Outside of normal business hours call 1-800-554-5738. More resources can be found at health.ar.gov/pertussis or <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/>.