



Public Health
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Panhandle Health District

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Healthy People in Healthy Communities

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NEWS RELEASE

Whooping Cough on the Rise

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The Panhandle Health District (PHD) is reporting an increase in confirmed cases of whooping cough, also known as pertussis, among Kootenai county residents. From 2021 through 2023, the District reported a total of nine cases of pertussis throughout the entire north Idaho area. Thus far in 2024, they've already reported 19 confirmed cases.

The majority of the cases are among those 0-18 years of age.

"Whooping cough is a very contagious illness and spreads easily from person to person," said PHD Epidemiologist Rebecca Betz. "People are typically contagious from the very first symptoms and can continue to remain contagious for up to 21 days without antibiotic intervention. Some people's symptoms will be mild, making it hard to recognize they have whooping cough."

Early symptoms of whooping cough can last for 1 to 2 weeks and usually include:

- Runny or stuffed-up nose
- Low-grade fever (less than 100.4 °F)
- Mild, occasional cough (babies do not do this)
- Apnea (life-threatening pauses in breathing) and cyanosis (turning blue or purple) in babies and young children

One to 2 weeks after the first symptoms start, people with whooping cough may develop violent, and uncontrolled coughing fits that can cause:

- A high-pitched "whoop" sound when they are finally able to inhale at the end of a coughing fit
- Vomiting during or after coughing fits
- Feeling very tired after the fit, but usually seem well in-between fits
- Struggling to breathe

Pertussis can cause serious illness in people of all ages but is most dangerous for babies. About one in eight infants with pertussis get pneumonia. About one in 100 infected infants will have convulsions. In rare cases, pertussis can be deadly, especially in infants less than 1 year of age. Many infants are infected by older siblings, parents, or other caregivers who might not know they have pertussis because early symptoms are similar to a cold.

When diagnosed by a health provider, pertussis can be treated with prescribed antibiotics. Treatment works best when started early, before any coughing fits start. Starting treatment after three weeks of illness is unlikely to help.

If you live with someone who has pertussis or if you have been exposed to pertussis and are at increased risk of serious disease (have asthma, are less than 1 year of age or more than 65 years of age) or will have contact with someone who is at increased risk of serious disease, talk to your doctor about whether you need preventive antibiotics. This is especially important if you have contact with a baby or a pregnant individual.

“Being vaccinated against pertussis is your best defense to avoid experiencing a severe case of the illness and can help limit the spread of the illness among your loved ones,” said Betz.

Pertussis vaccines (DTaP for infants and children, Tdap for adolescents, adults and pregnant women) are available in many doctors’ offices, local public health district offices, and pharmacies.

To ensure that you and your family are up-to-date on your vaccines, access your immunization records, here: <https://docket.care/>

For more information about pertussis, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/index.html>

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Panhandle Health District provides over 40 different public health programs to families, individuals and organizations in northern Idaho. From food and drinking water safety to health education and disease control, public health services are critical to ensure our community is a safe and healthy place to live, work and play.

The PHD team is made up of nurses, nutritionists, environmental health specialists, health educators and many other dedicated professionals with a common goal to deliver vital public health services.

Panhandle Health District is one of seven health districts in the state of Idaho.

