

## **Pertussis clinical reminder**

9 March, 2023

Te Whatu Ora is encouraging healthcare providers and professionals to be alert to the symptoms of pertussis/whooping cough and to encourage immunisation due to concerns about potential underlying community spread.

This comes following the recent tragic deaths of two people from whooping cough.

Pertussis is serious in very young children – during the last outbreak from October 2017 to May 2019, 50% of children with pertussis, who were aged under 1 year old, required hospitalisation.

Healthcare providers should consider pertussis as a possible alternative diagnosis, particularly in babies under 3 months with respiratory illness who may not present with the characteristic whoop.

Be aware of the red flags of a seriously ill infant:

- Apnoea
- Dehydration
- Lethargy
- Cyanosis or O2 saturations <92%
- Fever > or equal to 38 degrees C

And also consider early admission to hospital if any concerning clinical features:

- Poor feeding, with or without reduced urine output
- History of prematurity
- Infants aged < 3 months
- Children with a history of chronic respiratory disease, cardiac disease, neuromuscular disease, or immune deficiency
- Reduced alertness and responsiveness
- Repeat presentations in this illness

Any child less than 3 months of age with respiratory symptoms, whose caregiver has presented them for triage (via phone) should have a low threshold for offering an in-person assessment.

Free antenatal pertussis vaccination, with Boostrix, is available from general practice and also through many pharmacies across New Zealand. It can be given from the second trimester of every pregnancy and is recommended to have from 16 weeks, but at least 2 weeks before birth.

The whooping cough (pertussis) vaccination is free for:

- All children and young people aged under 18 years
- Pregnant people for every pregnancy
- All adults at 45 and 65 years of age as immunity reduces (same vaccine as the tetanus booster)
- Some groups at higher risk of becoming very unwell if they catch whooping cough (e.g. chronic respiratory conditions, congenital heart disease or immunocompromised)

View the whooping cough pathway on your local HealthPathways site for information.

Immunisation resources are available to download [here](#).