

Texas Department of State Health Services
NEWS RELEASE
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Pertussis Prompts Texas Health Alert

The Texas Department of State Health Services is urging people to make sure they're vaccinated against pertussis after projections show the number of people sick with the deadly disease this year is on track to reach the highest level in more than 50 years.

“This is extremely concerning. If cases continue to be diagnosed at the current rate, we will see the most Texas cases since the 1950s,” said Dr. Lisa Cornelius, DSHS infectious diseases medical officer. “Pertussis is highly infectious and can cause serious complications, especially in babies, so people should take it seriously.”

DSHS issued a health alert today advising doctors on diagnosing and treating pertussis. The state health department also strongly encourages people to make sure their children's and their own vaccinations are up to date. While infants remain the most at risk, people of all ages can still get pertussis.

DSHS has reported nearly 2,000 pertussis cases so far this year, and the annual total likely will surpass the recent high of 3,358 cases in 2009. There have also been two pertussis-related deaths in Texas this year, both of infants too young to be vaccinated.

To better protect babies, DSHS recommends pregnant women get a dose of pertussis vaccine during every pregnancy, preferably between 27 and 36 weeks of pregnancy. This helps protect the baby before he or she can start the vaccination series at 2 months old and helps keep the mother from getting sick and infecting the baby. Fathers, siblings, extended family members, medical providers and others who will be around newborns should also be vaccinated. Many babies get whooping cough from adults or older brothers or sisters who don't even know they have the disease. While symptoms are usually milder in teens and adults, pertussis can be life threatening for babies because of the risk of apnea, an interruption in breathing.

Pertussis is a bacterial infection that often starts with cold-like symptoms and a mild cough. After a week or two, severe coughing can begin and last for several weeks. Coughing fits may be followed by vomiting or a “whooping” sound, the reason the disease is also called “whooping cough.” Pertussis spreads easily through the air when an infected person breathes, coughs, or sneezes. People with pertussis are most contagious while they have cold-like symptoms and during the first two weeks after coughing starts.

Anyone with an unexplained, prolonged cough or who has had close contact with a person with pertussis should contact their health care provider. Early diagnosis and treatment may reduce the severity of symptoms and shorten the contagious period. Doctors who suspect a pertussis infection are required to report it to their local health department within one working day. Patients who have pertussis should not go back to work or school until they've completed five days of antibiotic treatment.

Parents are urged to check their children's shot records to be sure they are completely vaccinated against pertussis and should keep infants, especially those less than 6 months old, away from people with a cough. Adults should talk to their medical provider about receiving a booster dose of the Tdap vaccine.

A link to the complete health advisory is below.

- [Pertussis-HealthAlert-090313.pdf](#)

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