



Buncombe County Health & Human Services

Aging and Veteran's Services ~ Social Work Services
Public Assistance & Work Support Strategies ~ Public Health
Amanda Stone, MSW
Health and Human Services Director

To: Buncombe County Medical Providers
From: Dr. Jennifer Mullendore, Medical Director
Date: Tuesday, November 25, 2014
RE: Health alert from the Buncombe County Department of Health

Pertussis guidance for providers

Henderson and Transylvania counties are dealing with outbreaks of pertussis, and, of course, we in Buncombe always seem to have cases.

- When health department nurses conduct pertussis investigations and find symptomatic contacts to suspected or known cases, we often ask these persons to see their primary care provider for testing and evaluation, so you may be seeing an increase in patients fitting this description.
 - Health departments will also provide prophylactic antibiotics to asymptomatic high-risk contacts of suspected or known cases (e.g., infants, pregnant women, the immunocompromised).
- Additionally, you may be seeing more patients fitting the clinical picture of pertussis as these outbreaks spread.
- **Please have a high index of suspicion for pertussis during these outbreaks.**
- **Per NC law, you must contact the Disease Control staff of your local health department within 24 hours if you SUSPECT someone of having pertussis.**
 - By doing so, you help us prevent or stop the spread of pertussis in our community.
 - **Bottom line: If you suspect pertussis enough to test or treat for it, you need to call the Health Department immediately!**
 - **For Buncombe County Disease Control: call 250-5109, available 24/7 (even on holidays)**
- **Please remember to tell those patients you suspect or know to have pertussis to stay home under respiratory isolation (no work, no school, no extracurricular activities, no grocery shopping, etc.) until they finish their course of antibiotics.**
 - Most importantly, they should **stay away from unvaccinated infants and all pregnant women in their 3rd trimester.**

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- Please also continue to encourage vaccination of your patients, co-workers, family and friends with Tdap, including pregnant women in their 3rd trimester.
 - If you are unable to provide your patients Tdap in your office, please send them to their local health department.
 - Buncombe County Health and Human Services' Immunization Clinic (40 Coxe Ave.) is open Monday-Friday, 8am-5pm, no appointment necessary. Our clinic is closed Thursday, 11/27 and Friday, 11/28.

Symptoms of pertussis: In the absence of a more likely diagnosis, persons with the following symptoms should be suspected of having pertussis:

- Cough lasting for >2 weeks PLUS 1 of the following
 - paroxysms (violent fits) of coughing
 - inspiratory whoop
 - post-tussive vomiting
 - apnea (with or without cyanosis) in an infant <1 year old
- Keep in mind that infants <6 months of age, partially vaccinated children, adolescents and adults frequently do not have the characteristic whoop.

Testing for pertussis: All persons suspected of having pertussis should have the following 2 tests:

1. Culture of nasopharyngeal secretions for pertussis AND
2. PCR testing of nasopharyngeal secretions for pertussis

Incubation period: commonly 7-10 days

Communicability: Highly contagious in the first 2 wks; negligible by 3 weeks.

- Patients are no longer contagious after 5 days of treatment with appropriate antibiotics.

Treatment: Azithromycin (x 5 days), clarithromycin (x 7 days) or erythromycin (x 14 days) to shorten the period of communicability.

- Respiratory isolation of suspected or known cases until antibiotic course is completed.
- Suspected or known cases should stay away from infants & young children, especially unvaccinated infants, until they have completed 5 days of appropriate antibiotics.
- Suspected cases who do not receive antibiotics should be isolated for 3 weeks after the onset of cough or until the end of the cough, whichever comes first.

Prevention: Encourage vaccination against pertussis in all your patients who are not up-to-date!

- All contacts to a pertussis case should have their immunization status verified and brought up-to-date.

- Vaccination against pertussis following recent exposure is not effective against infection but is recommended to protect the person against further exposure in case he/she has not been infected.

Please contact the Disease Control staff of your local health department (#250-5109 for Buncombe County; available 24/7) if you have any questions regarding pertussis or any other communicable disease issue.

Thanks for your help in stopping the spread of pertussis,

Jenni

Jennifer Mullendore, MD, MSPH

Medical Director

Buncombe County Department of Health and Human Services

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