



OCT. 11, 2011

HEALTH ADVISORY

Recommendations for Pertussis Testing

Pertussis (whooping cough) is a contagious disease that lasts for many weeks or months and can cause severe coughing with a “whooping” sound or coughing that leads to vomiting. The disease can be life threatening for infants and usually is spread by adults to infants. Generally, the illness is less severe in those who are vaccinated. Pertussis is a mandatory reportable condition in the state of North Dakota. Suspected cases should be reported immediately to 800.472.2180 or online at www.ndhealth.gov/disease/reportcard/.

The North Dakota Department of Health recommends providers consider testing for pertussis when evaluating any patient with an unexplained, prolonged cough illness (longer than 14 days) characterized by one or more of the following symptoms:

- **Paroxysms**
- **Whoop**
- **Post-tussive gagging/vomiting**
- **Apnea**

Recently the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) has received several pertussis test results based on serology testing or an IgM positive lab result. Pertussis PCR and culture are the recommended tests for pertussis and the only tests that can confirm a case of pertussis. In order to ensure the necessary follow up of cases and their contacts, appropriate laboratory testing should be conducted.

Standardized serology tests are not available, making the results of commercially available serology tests difficult to interpret. Positive serology results from a private laboratory are not confirmatory. Patients meeting the clinical case definition that are serologically positive but not culture or PCR positive are not considered lab confirmed cases and should be reported as clinically diagnosed probable cases. Cases not meeting the clinical case definition that are serologically positive but not culture or PCR positive are not lab confirmed cases and will not be considered probable cases until the clinical case definition is met.

Determining who has pertussis and who does not is often difficult; therefore, a nasopharyngeal swab should be obtained from all individuals who are suspected cases. Asymptomatic individuals should never be tested for pertussis. Appropriate testing for pertussis should include a nasopharyngeal specimen for both culture and polymerase chain reaction (PCR). Pertussis testing kits are available at most major medical centers and from the Division of Laboratory Services at the NDDoH (701.328.6272).

Please contact the NDDoH Division of Disease Control at 701.328.2378 or toll-free at 800.472.2180 with any questions or concerns regarding this issue.

Categories of Health Alert messages:

- *Health Alert conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.*
- *Health Advisory provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.*
- *Health Update provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.*
- *Health Information provides general information that is not necessarily considered to be of an emergent nature.*

This message is being sent to local public health units, clinics, hospitals, physicians, tribal health, North Dakota Nurses Association, North Dakota Long Term Care Association, North Dakota Healthcare Association, North Dakota Medical Association, and hospital public information officers.