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## Clinician alert Pertussis: Remember to test and vaccinate.

**There have been high rates of pertussis infection in all age groups in the Cairns and Hinterland area. Consider pertussis (whooping cough) in patients with cough, particularly paroxysmal or prolonged cough or if associated with post-tussive vomiting, regardless of age or vaccination status.**

- Vaccinated cases often present with milder symptoms and therefore may be harder to identify. Immunity wanes over time, so even vaccinated people can get and transmit whooping cough, although the disease is usually less severe.
- Children do not always have a 'whoop'. Young infants may not cough but may present in respiratory distress with cyanosis and apnoea, feeding problems and weight loss, or seizures.
- Infants aged under 6 months are at greatest risk of severe disease, hospitalisation and death.

### Clinical considerations

Incubation period	Usually 7 – 10 days
Infectious period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Up to 21 days after the onset of cough <i>or</i></li><li>• Until a 5-day course of appropriate antibiotic has been complete</li></ul>
Testing	Nasopharyngeal swab or aspirate and request pertussis PCR testing Note serology is not recommended as a confirmatory test A pertussis PCR may be added on to a respiratory viral PCR sample.
High risk contacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women in their last month of pregnancy <i>and</i></li><li>• Infants &lt;6 months old</li></ul>

### Case management

- An appropriate antibiotic should be started as soon as possible and within 3 weeks of onset of cough to reduce symptoms and transmission.
- Refer neonates with pertussis for urgent specialist assessment or emergency care.
- Advise cases to stay home from childcare, school or work, and away from infants and pregnant women and their contacts, until they are no longer infectious (i.e. after 5 days of an appropriate antibiotic, 21 days after onset of cough, or 14 days after onset of paroxysmal cough).
- Notify your local public health unit early to discuss clusters of cases or follow-up and antibiotic prophylaxis for high-risk contacts.

### Vaccination

- Ensure patients are up to date with recommended vaccinations, particularly pregnant women between 20-32 weeks gestation, infants and their siblings, and adults who care for infants under 6 months of age who have not received a booster in the last 10 years.
- Pertussis vaccine is free for pregnant women, and for catch-up doses in children until 20 years of age.
- Refer to the Australian Immunisation Handbook: <https://immunisationhandbook.health.gov.au/>

Yours Sincerely



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