



COUNTY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO HEALTH AGENCY
PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT
PROVIDER HEALTH ADVISORY

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Pertussis: Be Alert for Illness and Report Suspect Cases

Collect specimens for PCR, not serology

Following the recent confirmation of several cases of pertussis in San Luis Obispo County and an upward trend in cases across California, the County of San Luis Obispo Public Health Department is asking providers to be alert for illness suggestive of pertussis and contact the Public Health Department about any cases that meet the clinical case definition or are PCR-positive.

While the number of pertussis cases confirmed in SLO County so far in 2024 is not unusual, California Department of Public Health data indicate that pertussis appears to be making a return to pre-pandemic levels.

Laboratory Testing: Collect Specimens for PCR, Not Serology

Commercially available serologic tests for pertussis have unproven or unknown clinical accuracy, with a reported sensitivity of 45-60% in most published studies. In contrast, molecular amplification tests offer high specificity and a sensitivity of 90-95%. To submit specimens for PCR, either at the Public Health Laboratory or a commercial laboratory, collect a nasopharyngeal swab specimen in transport medium or saline within three weeks of onset of the characteristic cough. CDC does not recommend laboratory testing after three weeks of cough. For details, see the [California Department of Public Health Pertussis Laboratory Testing Quicksheet](https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Imz/Pertussis/Pertussis-Laboratory-Testing-Quicksheet.aspx) (bit.ly/CDPH-pertussis).

Clinical Case Definition:

The clinical case definition of pertussis is, in the absence of a more likely diagnosis, a cough illness lasting more than two weeks with at least one of the following: paroxysms of coughing; or inspiratory "whoop;" or post-tussive vomiting; or for infants less than one year of age only, apnea (with or without cyanosis).

For Patients Coughing <21 Days:

- Collect a nasopharyngeal swab for pertussis PCR testing with/without culture.
- Do not delay treatment with appropriate antibiotics while waiting for laboratory results if there is no alternative diagnosis.
- Strongly consider antibiotic prophylaxis for pregnant patients in their third trimester, infants less than 1 year of age and all of their household members and caregivers, and all those attending or working in a childcare setting (i.e., same room) if there is an infant or a pregnant person in the setting.

Public Health Department

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www.slopublichealth.org

- CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend school exclusion for children with pertussis until they have completed 5 days of antibiotic treatment. Document and communicate all clinical decisions related to pertussis to the school (this includes children for whom you have ruled out pertussis).

For Patients Coughing \geq 21 Days:

- Laboratory testing for pertussis is not necessary. CDC does not recommend laboratory testing after 3 weeks of cough since PCR and culture are only sensitive during the first 2 to 3 weeks of cough when bacterial DNA is still present in the nasopharynx.
- For most patients, antibiotic treatment is not required. Antibiotics are no longer necessary after 21 days of cough with the following exception: you should treat infants and pregnant people in their third trimester through 6 weeks after cough onset.
- The patient is no longer infectious and can return to school.

For All Households:

Administer Tdap to contacts 11 years or older who have not been previously vaccinated with Tdap, DTaP to contacts 2 months through 6 years who are not up-to-date, or refer for vaccination to the Public Health Department.

To Report Suspect Cases:

- Call 805-781-5500 (M-F, 8 a.m.–5 p.m.) or 805-781-4553 (weekends and after hours).
- Fax the completed Confidential Morbidity Report (CMR) form (slocounty.ca.gov/CMR-Form-A) to the Public Health Department at 805-781-5543.
- Submit the completed Confidential Morbidity Report (CMR) form (slocounty.ca.gov/CMR-Form-A) via [CalREDIE](#).

For treatment recommendations:

Please see the [California Department of Public Health Pertussis Laboratory Testing Quicksheet](#) (bit.ly/CDPH-pertussis) or www.cdc.gov/pertussis.