



Department of Health and Human Services  
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
286 Water Street  
11 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011  
Tel: (207) 287-8016; Fax (207) 287-9058  
TTY Users: Dial 711 (Maine Relay)

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## Maine Health Alert Network (HAN) System

### PUBLIC HEALTH ADVISORY

**To:** Health Care Providers  
**From:** Dr. Isaac Benowitz, State Epidemiologist  
**Subject:** Pertussis Testing, Antibiotic Treatment, and Isolation  
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## Pertussis Testing, Antibiotic Treatment, and Isolation

### Summary

The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) reported 96 pertussis cases between January 1 and November 2, 2025, including 16 (17%) under 5 years old, 16 (17%) age 5–9 years, 53 (55%) age 10–19 years old, and 11 (11%) ages 20 years and older. At this time last year, Maine had 120 pertussis cases. Despite the reduction in cases from last year, the Maine CDC has recently had an increase in questions about pertussis, treatment, and isolation recommendations.

Prompt treatment and isolation of ill individuals help to reduce the spread of pertussis. Individuals diagnosed with pertussis should isolate until 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment have been completed or until 21 days have passed since cough onset. Individuals may resume normal activities after one of these criteria has been met. The Maine CDC created a [pertussis guide for health care providers](#) as a resource to build on provider knowledge of pertussis and to help navigate the identification, testing, treatment, and prevention of this illness.

### Testing

The Maine CDC recommends early testing with PCR in patients with signs and symptoms consistent with pertussis. Pertussis testing is most reliable when performed in the first 3 weeks of illness and is available at many commercial laboratories. Collect specimens before the patient begins antibiotic treatment. Avoid testing asymptomatic persons, as it increases the likelihood of obtaining false positive results.

### Treatment

[Treatment options](#) vary by age. Early treatment is most effective, but if pertussis is not recognized early, U.S. CDC finds it reasonable to treat people 1 year of age and older within 3 weeks of cough onset, infants younger

than 1 year of age within 6 weeks of cough onset, and pregnant people (especially if near term) within 6 weeks of cough onset.

U.S. CDC recommends that health care providers strongly consider treating before receiving test results if the patient has:

- clinical history strongly suggestive of pertussis;
- high risk for severe or complicated disease;
- or contact with someone at high risk for severe disease.
  - This includes infants, people in the third trimester of pregnancy, and those with immunocompromising conditions or other medical conditions that may increase the risk of severe disease, such as moderate to severe asthma.

### **Isolation**

To reduce spread of disease, **patients should isolate until one of these criteria has been met:**

- **they have completed 5 days of antibiotic treatment, OR**
- **until 21 days have passed since cough onset.**

### **Prophylaxis**

Administer antibiotic prophylaxis to asymptomatic household members regardless of vaccination status. Close contacts that are at high risk for severe disease should also receive prophylaxis. Asymptomatic contacts do not need to isolate. Treat symptomatic household members and recommend isolation until either they have completed 5 days of antibiotic treatment or 21 days have passed since cough onset. Regimens for postexposure prophylaxis are the same as treatment.

### **Immunization**

Ensure all patients are up to date on pertussis vaccination per [U.S. CDC recommendations](#). Pertussis containing vaccines are part of [Maine's immunization requirements for school children and Maine's child care immunization standards](#).

### **Reporting**

Report all pertussis cases promptly to the Maine CDC. Disease reports should be made through electronic laboratory reporting.

### **Resources**

- Pertussis (Maine CDC): <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/diseases-conditions/infectious-diseases/respiratory-virus/pertussis>
- Maine CDC, [Pertussis Guide for Health Care Providers](#): Found in the resources section of the Pertussis webpage.
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (U.S. CDC), Pertussis: <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/hcp/clinical-overview/>
  - Treatment of Pertussis: <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/hcp/clinical-care/index.html>
  - Testing for Pertussis: <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/php/laboratories/index.html>
- Pertussis Vaccine Recommendations: <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/hcp/vaccine-recommendations>
- Maine Immunization Program [www.immunizeme.org](http://www.immunizeme.org)
- Maine's Immunization Requirements for Schools, Child Care & Camp: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/diseases-conditions/immunization/immunization-requirements-for-schools-child-care-camp>
- Maine Notifiable Conditions: [https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/rule-2025-06/10-144%20CMR%20Ch.%20258%20Control%20of%20Notifiable%20Diseases%20and%20Conditions%20Rule\\_0.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/rule-2025-06/10-144%20CMR%20Ch.%20258%20Control%20of%20Notifiable%20Diseases%20and%20Conditions%20Rule_0.pdf)