

HEALTH ALERT

Increases in Respiratory Pathogens 2024-2025 Respiratory Season Update

Summary

According to the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there have been recent increases of certain bacterial respiratory pathogens, including *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* (*M. pneumoniae*) and *Bordetella pertussis* (*B. pertussis*). Circulation activity of these pathogens is now returning to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. Healthcare professionals should anticipate an increase in other respiratory illnesses such as respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), influenza, and COVID-19. Providers are encouraged to review guidance for diagnosis, treatment, isolation, and vaccination included in this advisory.

Background and Recommendations for Healthcare Providers:

***M. pneumoniae* and unspecified pneumonia infections**

As reported by the CDC, over the past six months there has been a steady increase in the proportion of patients discharged from emergency departments in the U.S. with a diagnosis of *M. pneumoniae*-associated pneumonia or acute bronchitis. Delaware County is consistent with the rest of Ohio seeing an increase in reported cases of *M. pneumoniae* and unspecified pneumonia – mostly in school and childcare settings.

Clinicians are encouraged to remain aware of increased circulation of *M. pneumoniae*, specifically where clinical presentation is suggestive of pneumonia. Laboratory testing, especially among hospitalized children, for *M. pneumoniae* is highly encouraged to help guide clinical decision making. First-line antibiotics used for treatment of *M. pneumoniae* include Macrolides (e.g., azithromycin). This is due to the *M. pneumoniae* bacteria being naturally resistant to certain antibiotics (e.g., beta-lactams/amoxicillin) commonly used to treat other kinds of bacterial pneumonia.

***B. pertussis* (whooping cough)**

CDC Pertussis Surveillance and Trends indicates that *B. pertussis* cases are returning to pre-COVID-19 pandemic patterns in the U.S. National data shows that the number of reported pertussis cases in 2024 is higher than it was at the same period in 2019, prior to the pandemic. Ohio is following along with the National trend of cases increasing to pre-pandemic levels with 1,416 reported cases. At the time of this report, the Health District has 70 reported pertussis cases that meet case classification criteria for either suspected, probable, or confirmed.

Diagnosis of pertussis within the first two weeks of illness is difficult from clinical examination alone. Whenever possible, healthcare providers are strongly encouraged to obtain a nasopharyngeal swab or aspirate for laboratory testing from anyone with suspected pertussis. For a timelier diagnosis, use of RT-PCR testing is recommended.

As a reminder, anyone diagnosed with pertussis should isolate for five days following the initiation of effective antimicrobial therapy. When pertussis is strongly suspected, attempts should be made to identify and provide chemoprophylaxis to household and other close contacts. Suspected cases not receiving antibiotics should be isolated for three weeks (21 days) after the onset of paroxysmal cough, or until the paroxysmal cough disappears – whichever occurs first. Date of cough onset should be considered day zero. Immunity from vaccination or natural infection does wane over time, so infection can still occur in people who have previously been vaccinated or had the infection. However, vaccination is known to significantly reduce disease severity and patients should be advised to stay up to date with pertussis vaccinations. Pertussis is a Class B reportable infectious disease in the state of Ohio.

Respiratory Virus Season – Updates and Recommendations:

According to the CDC’s National tracking data, overall, respiratory illness activity in the U.S. is currently considered to be low. COVID-19 activity remains low and is stable in most areas of the U.S. Seasonal influenza activity is increasing slightly among children but remains low nationally. RSV activity is elevated nationally, and trends continue to increase in the southern, central, and eastern U.S. – particularly among young children. Ohio is currently experiencing low influenza-like illness activity and moderate overall respiratory illness activity. The Health District currently does not have any reported cases of influenza-associated hospitalizations.

In anticipation of increased respiratory virus circulation and as a reminder, anyone with respiratory illness symptoms should isolate until 24 hours after resolution of fever, without having taken any fever reducing medications AND symptoms have improved.

Healthcare providers are encouraged to counsel patients about testing and other preventative measures, such as covering coughs/sneezes, masking, staying at home when sick, and handwashing to protect themselves and others against respiratory diseases.

For More Information

For general questions or more information regarding respiratory illnesses, please contact the Health District’s Disease Control and Response Unit at 740-368-1700 or email DCRU@delawarehealth.org.

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncird/whats-new/mycoplasma-pneumoniae-infections-have-been-increasing.html>