

JAM Session 18:

Rising Pertussis Cases - Protect Your Patients and Yourself

Situation: Guam has had 21 lab-confirmed pertussis cases. Staff should treat cough illness seriously, especially when patients or parents report concern for whooping cough.

What staff need to know:

- Pertussis can look like a regular viral cough early on.
- Patients can be contagious early (catarrhal phase) before classic symptoms.
- Vaccinated patients and adults may have mild or atypical symptoms—cough may occur without a “whoop”.
- Droplet Precautions matter when pertussis is suspected.
- Exposed staff may still receive Post-Exposure-Prophylaxis (PEP) if within **21 days of last exposure**. CDC guidance supports PEP for exposed healthcare personnel, or daily monitoring for 21 days if PEP is not given.

Think pertussis when there is:

- Persistent or worsening cough
- Coughing fits
- Post-cough vomiting
- Whoop sound, though this may be absent
- Vaccinated patients and adults may have mild or atypical symptoms—cough may occur without a “whoop”.
- Known exposure or parent/patient concern

Do this immediately:

- Mask the coughing patient.
- Place the patient in a private room on Droplet Precautions in addition to Standard Precautions when Pertussis is suspected. Use an N95 during AGPs.
- Notify the provider and charge nurse.
- **Strongly consider confirmatory testing** especially in individuals that are for admission and patients that share congregate settings (e.g. daycare, Hemodialysis, senior care center).
- **Start antibiotics promptly** (Azithromycin preferred)
- Treat within **21 days of cough onset** to reduce spread. **Patients are no longer contagious after 5 days of effective antibiotics.**



What counts as an exposure?

Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) may be needed.

- **Within ~3 feet of a coughing patient** with suspected/confirmed Pertussis **without a mask**
- **Direct patient care or close interaction** during coughing episodes without appropriate PPE
- **Contact with respiratory secretions** (e.g. suctioning, handling tissues) without protection
- **Present during aerosol-generating procedures** (AGPs) without appropriate PPE (inclusive of N95, particulate respirator).

If YES to any: **Report to Employee Health / Infection Control**

What happens next:

- PEP (e.g. Azithromycin) may be offered if within **21 days of last exposure**
- If no PEP -> **daily symptoms monitoring for 21 days**
- Symptomatic staff with suspected or confirmed pertussis shall be excluded from work until **5 days after starting effective antibiotics or 21 days from cough onset** if untreated.