

MEDIA RELEASE

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Public health alert: Whooping cough on the rise in Nelson region

Five confirmed cases and a further 18 suspected cases of whooping cough (pertussis) have been notified recently to the Nelson Marlborough Public Health Service (PHS). All come from the Nelson region.

Dr Stephen Bridgman, Medical Officer of Health, has advised all GPs in the wider region, including Marlborough, to be alert to pertussis symptoms, test for the contagious disease and to notify the PHS of any cases.

Dr Bridgman urges people and parents to be vigilant and seek immediate advice from their GP if they or their children show symptoms.

He also urges pregnant women to book in for a free pertussis vaccination if they have not already been vaccinated.

“Whooping cough affects people of all ages, but can be very serious for infants,” Dr Bridgman says.

“The best thing to do is to keep your vaccinations up to date – these are free for children and pregnant women and are your best chance of avoiding this infectious disease. Contact your doctor or practice nurse if you are unsure whether you or your family has been vaccinated, and book in vaccination if they haven’t.

“Whooping cough is very easily spread in the air when an infected person sneezes or coughs. It’s difficult to avoid catching it if one person in a home or class is contagious, so it’s important that people act on the symptoms quickly and get it treated with antibiotics.”

Know the symptoms

Whooping cough is most infectious in the first two weeks. The symptoms usually appear around a week after infection and start just like a common cold – runny nose, sneezing, slight fever and a mild irritating cough.

After a week or two, coughing fits (paroxysms) are the main symptom. A paroxysm is characterised by:

- a spasm of coughing which brings up thick phlegm
- a sharp intake of breath or ‘whoop’ sound after a cough (mainly in children, not babies or adults)
- vomiting after coughing, especially in infants and young children
- tiredness and redness in the face from the effort of coughing.

If you suspect you or your children has whooping cough, call your GP or Healthline first

“Whooping cough is very contagious, so please call your GP or Healthline rather than going into the waiting room,” Dr Bridgman says. Call Healthline on 0800 611 116.

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