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For Immediate Release

Help stop the spread of whooping cough

With an increase in *Bordetella pertussis* (whooping cough) throughout Newfoundland and Labrador, the Nunatsiavut Government's Department of Health and Social Development (DHSD) is urging residents of the five Labrador Inuit communities (Nain, Hopedale, Postville, Makkovik and Rigolet) to help stop the spread.

On May 9, 2024, Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services declared an outbreak of a highly contagious vaccine-preventable respiratory illness caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*, in eastern Newfoundland, and the outbreak was expanded to include all health zones on September 9. Since then, cases of pertussis have continued to rise within the Labrador-Grenfell Zone, including numerous cases in recent weeks in Labrador Inuit communities.

Pertussis can affect people of all ages, but infants aged one year or younger are at greatest risk of severe complications, including pauses in breathing, pneumonia, seizures, brain swelling and death. It often starts with a mild fever, runny nose, and a cough, and can lead to serious coughing fits that can last for two to eight weeks. The coughing fits may cause difficulty breathing, choking, and vomiting. Infants may also have poor feeding.

If your child is experiencing symptoms of pertussis, contact your primary care provider or 811 as soon as possible. Individuals diagnosed as having pertussis should not return to school or work and should avoid public gatherings, infants, and pregnant women for five days after the start of appropriate antibiotic treatment.

Prevention is key to stopping the spread of pertussis. Vaccinations that provide protection are part of Newfoundland and Labrador's recommended routine childhood and school immunization schedules. In response to current outbreak, the provincial school immunization campaign has been expanded to offer the vaccine *Tdap* in Grades 8 and 9, as well as in Grades 6 and 7 in select schools.

A booster dose of the vaccine is also recommended once in adulthood, and for pregnant people in the third trimester, ideally in weeks 27-32. Infants under one year of age are among the most vulnerable groups, facing serious complications. NL Health Services strongly encourages individuals to update their *Tdap* vaccine at least two weeks before meeting or caring for a baby. Vaccinating pregnant individuals, parents, siblings, grandparents, and friends protects the baby until they are old enough to complete their own vaccinations.

Individuals are strongly advised to stay home when they are sick to prevent the spread of whooping cough and other infectious diseases, thereby protecting those most at risk. Community residents are reminded to protect themselves and their families by practicing good health habits: cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or your arm; regularly clean your hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer; and stay home when you're sick to minimize the spread of germs.

Individuals in either of the five Labrador Inuit communities who have questions about pertussis booster/*Tdap* vaccine availability, are encouraged to call their local public health office.

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