



# Pertussis is Peaking: Take Action!

- ▶ **Think pertussis**—*Consider the diagnosis of pertussis in your patients and their close contacts*  
**Young infants:** The diagnosis of pertussis is often delayed or missed because of a deceptively mild onset of runny nose. There usually is no fever. Cough may be undetectable or mild. Illness may present as apnea, hypoxia or seizures. After a few days, mild illness may suddenly transform into respiratory distress. A white blood cell count of >20,000 cells/mm<sup>3</sup> with >50% lymphocytes is a strong indication of pertussis.  
**Adolescents and adults:** Most cases are not diagnosed. A misdiagnosis of bronchitis or asthma is common. The patient may report of episodes of a choking sensation or of sweating. Leukocytosis/lymphocytosis is not likely to occur in this population.
- ▶ **Test for pertussis**—*Delays in recognition of pertussis may contribute to adverse clinical outcomes*  
Obtain nasal aspirate (preferred specimen) or nasopharyngeal swab for PCR and/or culture promptly.
- ▶ **Treat for pertussis**—*Delays in treatment before or after hospitalization may increase the risk of fatal illness*  
**Young infants:** Because pertussis may progress rapidly in young infants we suggest that you treat suspected and confirmed cases promptly with azithromycin, monitor them very closely, and consider hospitalization in a facility that has direct access to intensive care (especially if the infant is <3 months of age). Almost all fatal cases have extreme leukocytosis with lymphocytosis, pneumonia, and pulmonary hypertension.
- ▶ **Report pertussis**—*Prompt reporting supports prevention and control efforts*  
Report suspected and confirmed cases of pertussis promptly to your local public health department to assist in preventing additional cases.
- ▶ **Prevent pertussis**—*Assess pertussis immunization status, and use every patient encounter to vaccinate*
  - All close contacts to infants and health care workers should be immunized against pertussis with Tdap or DTaP vaccine, as age appropriate.
  - Vaccinate for pertussis at the earliest opportunity, especially during hospitalization for birth and clinic visits for wound management, checkups or acute care.

