



Dr. Sheila Pinette
Director, Maine CDC

Public Health Update

January 26, 2012

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Pertussis 2011 summary

More than 200 cases of pertussis (whooping cough) were reported to Maine CDC during 2011, far exceeding the number of reported cases in 2010 (53) and the 10-year average of 82 cases per year.

The number of cases reported per week during 2011 peaked at 21 in the second week of November, but decreased to 5 or fewer cases per week during December. The majority of reported pertussis infections occurred in Penobscot County (67%), but sporadic infections occurred in other parts of the state. Clusters of pertussis occurred in schools, camps, sport teams and workplaces.

Pertussis is caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis* and is a highly communicable, vaccine-preventable, respiratory disease that can last for many weeks. Pertussis is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory secretions of infected persons who cough or breathe on someone else. Classic pertussis symptoms include paroxysmal cough, whoop, and posttussive vomiting. Pertussis can cause serious illness and can even be life-threatening, especially in infants.

Maine CDC has worked extensively with schools and communities to implement control measures and prevent disease transmission. These efforts include numerous health communications to inform medical providers, school officials, child care providers, and the public about pertussis and how to prevent infections. Maine CDC collaborated with school officials in two schools that experienced pertussis outbreaks to rapidly organize and stand up pertussis vaccination clinics. Maine CDC also requested assistance from US CDC to better understand the school outbreaks, determine the effectiveness of pertussis booster vaccinations in preventing disease transmission, and the acceptability of providing pertussis vaccine in school settings during an outbreak.

Medical providers should continue to be on the lookout for pertussis. Providers should also check the vaccination status of their patients and make sure they are up to date for age on pertussis vaccines.

- General information on pertussis can be found on the Maine CDC website <http://go.usa.gov/nTI> or the US CDC website <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/>
- For information about pertussis vaccine or vaccine schedules please contact the Maine Immunization program at www.immunizeme.org or by calling 1-800-867-4755.
- Maine CDC epidemiologists are available to answer any questions about pertussis diagnosis or management through the 24/7 disease reporting line at 1-800-821-5821.

Radon testing

Radon, a naturally-occurring radioactive gas, is the number one cause of lung cancer among non-smokers according to the Surgeon General and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In an effort to spread the word about radon, its effects and where it is found, January has been designated as National Radon Action Month.

Maine CDC has partnered with Spruce Environmental Technologies to provide low-cost professional radon training courses to interested Maine residents. Registration for these classes continues through the end of the month.

Classes will be held February 8-10 at 100 Waterman Drive in South Portland and are funded in part by grants received from the EPA. A two-day class in residential radon measurement at a cost of \$99 (regularly \$299) and a one-day class in radon in water (\$79, regularly \$185), provide the minimum training needed to register to conduct radon testing in Maine

Radon can be found at high levels in many homes and is often found in areas with a lot of granite. Pinette said that home inspectors, contractors and real estate professionals can benefit from learning more about radon testing and how to reduce radon levels.

For more information, or for a list of trained and licensed radon professionals, visit the Maine Radon Homepage at www.maineradiationcontrol.org

Travelers' health

Maine CDC investigated multiple cases of travel-related illness in 2011. With school vacation week coming up in February, it is likely some Maine residents will travel outside the US to warmer climates, putting them at risk for vector-borne and food-borne diseases.

Many travel-related illnesses can be prevented by vaccinations, good hand washing, and knowledge of high risk conditions in other countries.

Travel-related disease conditions seen in Maine:

- Hepatitis A is one of the most common vaccine-preventable infections acquired during travel. It is transmitted by consuming contaminated food or water and can be spread from person-to-person. Hepatitis A can best be prevented by vaccination and good hand hygiene.
- Malaria is a mosquito-borne parasitic disease that can be prevented by taking medication before and during travel. It occurs in more than 100 tropical and subtropical countries.
- Dengue fever is a mosquito-borne viral illness that occurs in many tropical and subtropical countries worldwide. The best way to prevent dengue fever is to avoid being bitten by infected mosquitoes.
- Leishmaniasis is a parasitic disease found in the tropics, subtropics, and southern Europe. It is transmitted through the bite of infected sand flies and the best form of prevention is to avoid being bitten.

Maine CDC recommends that clinicians counsel patients who plan to travel on precautions they can take to prevent travel-related illness. Clinicians are also recommended to obtain recent travel history, especially travel outside of the US, for symptomatic patients. US CDC recommends vaccines based on the travel destination, which are available at <http://go.usa.gov/nb2>. All suspected cases of travel-related illnesses that are notifiable conditions (<http://go.usa.gov/nbj>) should be reported to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

Cervical cancer screening

January is National Cervical Cancer Awareness month. Maine CDC encourages women to schedule a Pap test, especially if it has been five or more years since the last test.

Cervical cancer is the second-most common cause of cancer in women under age 35. Most cases of cervical cancer are easily preventable with regular screening tests and follow-up. It also is highly curable when found and treated early. Women should check with their doctor to find out if they need a Pap test or other cancer screenings, including a mammogram, a FIT test (Fecal Immunochemical Test), or a colonoscopy.

US CDC has posted an online feature about cervical cancer prevention and treatment at <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/CervicalCancer/>

For more information about breast, cervical or colorectal cancer or to learn if you qualify for free screening, women should call 1-800-350-5180 and press 1 or visit <http://go.usa.gov/n2S>

For more information about travel-related illness, visit:

- Travel medicine clinics in Maine: <http://go.usa.gov/nbZ>
- US CDC travelers' health: <http://go.usa.gov/nbW>
- Maine CDC: www.mainepublichealth.gov

Influenza update

Maine CDC reported sporadic flu activity for the week ending Jan. 21. Weekly updates on flu activity are available online:

- for Maine: <http://go.usa.gov/NoK>
- for the US: <http://go.usa.gov/ITB>
- for the world: <http://go.usa.gov/ITK>

Maine CDC reminds everyone to take everyday preventive measures against the flu:

- Wash your hands frequently
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow or shoulder
- Stay home when you feel sick
- Get vaccinated

Updated reports

- 4th Quarter 2011 animal rabies update: <http://go.usa.gov/n2N>
- Monthly HIV/STD update for December 2011:
<http://go.usa.gov/n2R>

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For clinical consultation and outbreak management guidance, call Maine CDC's toll-free 24-hour phone line:

1-800-821-5821