

ELABORATIONS

News and Issues for Washington's Clinical Laboratories

VOLUME XXV • ISSUE V

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025

ELABORATIONS is a free bi-monthly publication of the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) Public Health Laboratories (PHL) and the Medical Test Site (MTS) Program.

Secretary, DOH: Dennis Worsham
Acting Health Officer: Scott Lindquist, MD
Acting Director, PHL: Vincent Aoki
Program Manager, MTS: Jessica Holloway
Survey & Investigation Manager, MTS: Heather Pinnick
Editor & Circulation: Chuck Talburt

Comments, letters to the editor, information for publication, and requests for subscription can be directed to:

ELABORATIONS

1610 NE 150th St
Shoreline, WA 98155

e-mail address: chuck.talburt@doh.wa.gov

NOTE: Letters to the editor may be published unless specified otherwise by the author.

Website access:

[Department of Health](#)
[Medical Test Site Program](#)
[Public Health Laboratories](#)

Inside This Issue

- 1-2 Pertussis Updates – Washington State
- 3 Practice Guidelines
- 4 Calendar of Events

Pertussis Updates – Washington State

The Washington State Department of Health's (DOH) [Vaccine Preventable Disease Program](#) is sharing an update about pertussis activity in the state and to clarify requirements for laboratories under the state's [Notifiable Conditions Rule-Laboratories](#). This update follows the publication of the pertussis article in the November/December 2024 *Elaborations* publication.

Background

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a cough illness caused primarily by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. The illness is characterized by paroxysms or “fits” of coughing, which may lead to vomiting, an inspiratory “whoop” upon breathing in, and can be severe enough to cause broken ribs in adults. In infants, who are at the highest risk of severe disease, apnea may occur. Pertussis is highly contagious, and individuals with the disease are typically infectious for several weeks, with the course of illness often lasting up to 10 weeks or longer. The public health system conducts disease surveillance for pertussis and responds to cases and outbreaks to protect our most vulnerable community members.

During the 10 years from 2014 to 2023, an average of 500 confirmed or probable pertussis cases were reported per year in Washington State. Starting in 2020, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of widespread mitigation strategies, reported case counts for pertussis dropped substantially, with only 15 cases reported in 2021, 76 in 2022 and 87 in 2023.

2024 Resurgence

In 2024, Washington State experienced a significant resurgence in pertussis activity reminiscent of pre-pandemic disease levels. More than 2,200 confirmed or probable pertussis cases were reported statewide in 2024, compared to only 87 in 2023. This was a 25-fold increase over the previous year and the highest incidence since 2012. Pertussis was widespread, affecting 34 of the state's 39 counties, with a significant spike in cases occurring during the final quarter of the year. By year-end, the overall incidence rate reached 28.4 cases per 100,000 residents. Infants under one year of age were particularly vulnerable, experiencing a rate of 232.2 cases per 100,000. Tragically, the state reported its first pertussis-related death since 2011—a reminder of the disease's potential severity.

More information on pertussis activity in 2024 can be found in [the Washington State Annual Pertussis Summary, 2024 Preliminary Data report](#). Current pertussis data are available in the [Washington State Weekly Pertussis Update](#), which is updated on Fridays.

Clarifying requirements for laboratories for pertussis under WAC [246-101-201](#)

Detection of *Bordetella pertussis* in the laboratory through a nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT), such as polymerase chain reaction (PCR), or a culture-based method, results in a requirement to report the laboratory result to the public health system within 24 hours.

Some confusion has arisen over when specimen submission to the Washington State Public Health Laboratories (WA PHL) is required. Specimen submission is required in two circumstances:

1. When a positive culture for *B. pertussis* is obtained. Always submit all *B. pertussis* isolates to WA PHL within two business days.
2. **Upon request only:** if an isolate is not available, a specimen associated with a positive result.
 - a. Submission of NAAT- or PCR-positive specimens is generally **not required** unless specifically requested by the Local Health Jurisdiction or by DOH.

WA PHL has experienced an increase in submissions of specimens that tested PCR-positive for *B. pertussis*. These specimens do not need to be submitted to WA PHL unless requested and generally **will not be tested**. The [Notifiable Conditions Poster for Laboratories](#) has been updated with a footnote (footnote #6) to clarify which *B. pertussis* specimens are required to be submitted to WA PHL.

Note: There is still no requirement to report positive serology tests for pertussis, and those serum specimens do not need to be submitted.

Pertussis is difficult to diagnose, and it requires specific treatment, so laboratory testing is recommended for all patients who are suspected of having the disease. The role of laboratorians in identifying cases of pertussis is critical to the public health system and forms the foundation of our ability to respond to and mitigate disease occurring in our communities.



2025 Virtual 32nd Annual Washington Clinical Laboratory Conference: November 17

The Calendar of Events is a list of upcoming conferences, deadlines, and other dates of interest to the clinical laboratory community. If you have events that you would like to have included, please mail them to chuck.talbert@doh.wa.gov. Information must be received at least one month prior to the scheduled event. The editor reserves the right to make final decisions on inclusion in *ELABORATIONS*.

ELABORATIONS

Washington State Department of Health, 1610 NE 150th St, Shoreline, WA 98155



DOH 505-068 January 2025 (CS)

To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127. Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email doh.information@doh.wa.gov.