

Doctors Still Concerned with Whooping Cough Numbers

2004 was the worst year for whooping cough cases in recent years and doctors fear the worst is still to come. Notification rates for the last 12 months from ESR indicate the epidemic is continuing to spread at an alarming rate.

In December there were 538 cases notified throughout the country bringing the total for 2004 to 3492 cases, compared with only 558 cases for the entire year of 2003.

December notifications were slightly down on the November record peak but according to Dr Nikki Turner, the Director of the University of Auckland's Immunisation Advisory Centre (IMAC), small monthly fluctuations occur as epidemics accelerate. "All the signs are that this epidemic still has many months to go. It has barely touched the larger populations of the North Island so far," she said.

The worst hit South Island District Health Board is Southland, which has a cumulative rate of 593 notifications per 100,000 of population for December 2004, whereas the worst hit in the North Island so far is Waikato, with a cumulative rate of 148 per 100,000 population.

Increased notifications were seen in 7 of the 15 North Island District Health Boards, with only 2 of the 6 South Island DHBs reporting increased notifications in December.

"It's the littlest ones who are hardest hit and who are usually terribly sick and hospitalised when they catch whooping cough. They are particularly at risk of catching it from older brothers and sisters." says Dr Turner. "If you've got a baby or a toddler it's essential your older children are up-to-date with their immunisations. With lots around in the community many older children and adults are coming home coughing around our younger children. Any one out there with a nasty or prolonged cough should think - "*could this be whooping cough?*". A course of antibiotics does reduce the spread of this nasty bug".



ESR reports for December that “The current rate¹ by age group was highest amongst infants aged less than one year (331.2 per 100 000 population), followed by the children in the 5-9 years age group (231.0), and children in the 10-14 years age group (207.4)”.

“Most new parents are really responding to the alerts,” says Dr Turner. “We had several calls over the holiday break from parents of newborns looking for a surgery where they could get their babies vaccinated on time. They know starting early protection from 6 weeks is really important,” she says. “The hardest calls to deal with are from worried parents asking advice when their friend’s children or family have whooping cough and have declined to take the antibiotics that reduces the spread. It can be a devastating disease and it’s frightening when people take it so lightly around vulnerable babies.”

Provisional ESR figures show 342 children under 5 years old were affected in 2004. The regions with the highest notifications for children under 5 for 2004 are West Coast (74 cases) Otago (71) Canterbury (64) and Waikato (52). These figures are particularly concerning in regions with relatively small populations.

Four infants have died from whooping cough in the past 4 years in New Zealand.

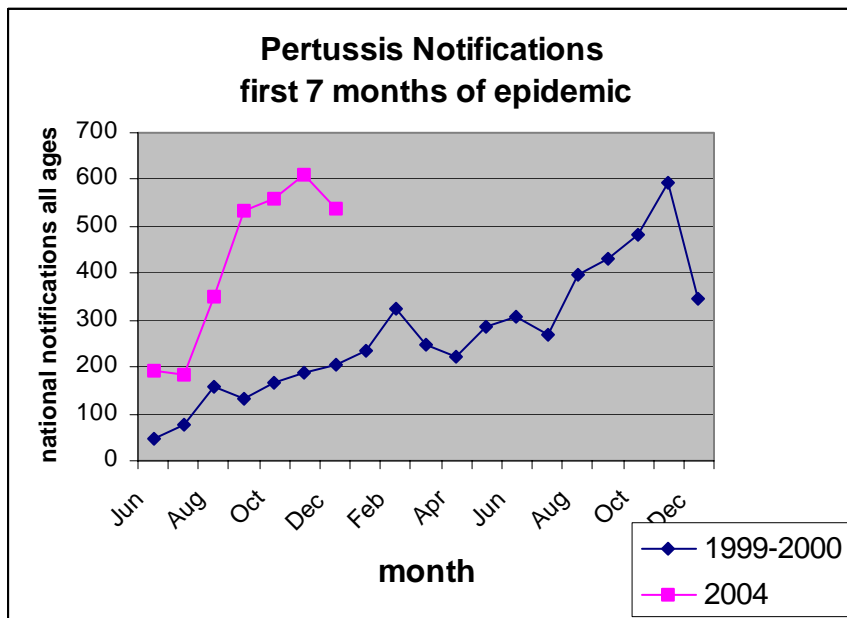
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ESR DATA

¹ Current rate means the annual notification rate over the last 12-month period



PERTUSSIS NOTIFICATIONS DECEMBER 2004

Surveillance data by District Health Board - December 2004

Cases this month
 Current rate¹

Disease	Cases for December 2004, ² and current rate ^{1,2} by District Health Board ^{3,4}																				
	Northland	Waitemata	Auckland	Counties Manukau	Waikato	Lakes	Bay of Plenty	Tairāwhiti	Taranaki	Hawke's Bay	Whanganui	MidCentral	Hutt	Capital and Coast	Wairarapa	Nelson-Marlborough	West Coast	Canterbury	South Canterbury	Otago	Southland
Pertussis	8	9	12	9	66	13	22	3	2	2	0	2	10	18	1	69	2	181	10	17	82
	63.5	22.6	24.5	20.2	148.9	85.4	67.9	59.2	15.5	25.8	1.6	34.2	37.2	27.2	5.2	410.7	29.7	162.5	170.5	178.0	593.2

- 1 Current rate is based on the cumulative total for the 12 months up to and including December 2004 expressed as cases per 100 000
- 2 These data are provisional
- 3 AIDS data is reported for the greater Auckland and Wellington areas, rather than by District Health Board
- 4 Further data are available from the local medical officer of health
- 5 These totals and rates are derived from the EpiSurv report date as opposed to the earliest available date used in the meningococcal disease section.

PERTUSSIS NOTIFICATIONS November 2004

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Cases this month Current rate¹

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Pertussis	6	18	11	11	76	18	14	1	0	0	0	4	6	19	1	92	2	170	17	53	92
	59.2	22.1	22.8	18.4	131.9	76.1	58.4	54.6	13.6	27.2	3.1	32.9	29.6	20.3	5.2	356.0	26.4	121.5	157.3	171.0	516.8

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