
Diagnostic Test Recommendations for Pertussis

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Diagnostic Test Recommendations for Pertussis

May 1, 2009

Consider pertussis in an individual with a paroxysmal cough or cough lasting 2 weeks or more.

1) Isolation of *Bordetella pertussis* and PCR testing¹:

- a) Collect a nasopharyngeal swab or aspirate using a Pertussis kit.
- b) Ideally, specimens should be collected during the catarrhal stage — the first two weeks of cough.
- c) These kits are available in packs of six and can be ordered from your local Public Health Laboratory. These swabs contain clear medium.
- d) If ordering the kits from the Toronto Public Health Laboratory, please call the order desk at 416-235-5937, or fax to 416-235-5753.
- e) Once the specimen has been collected, the swab is inserted into the clear medium. Cut excess wire with sterile scissors and cap vial tightly.
- f) Ensure that the lab requisition indicates that this is a **nasopharyngeal swab or aspirate**

and that you are requesting **pertussis testing**. Mark the symptoms, date of onset of cough, exposure history, vaccination history and outbreak number on the requisition.

- g) Store specimens in the refrigerator until sent to the laboratory. Specimens must be stored and shipped cold.

Expected Time to Receive Results:

Results will be available in several days.

Results: When the *Bordetella* DNA is detected at low levels, the results will need to be interpreted in the context of the presenting clinical illness.² PCR positive laboratory results in an asymptomatic person will not be considered confirmatory.

Note: Please ensure that your local public health unit is aware of all individuals who are being tested for pertussis.

Reference:

1. Public Health Laboratories. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. Specimen Collection Guide, March 2009. Available at: <http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/pub/labs/specimen.html>
2. Public Health Laboratories. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion. Labstract, December 2008.