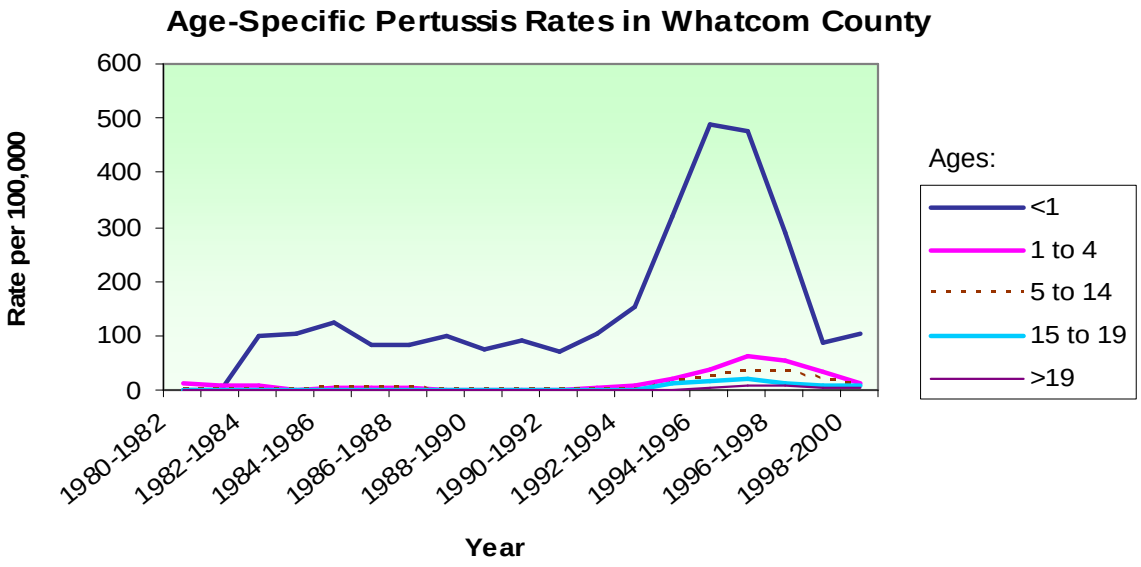
Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Why is pertussis important?

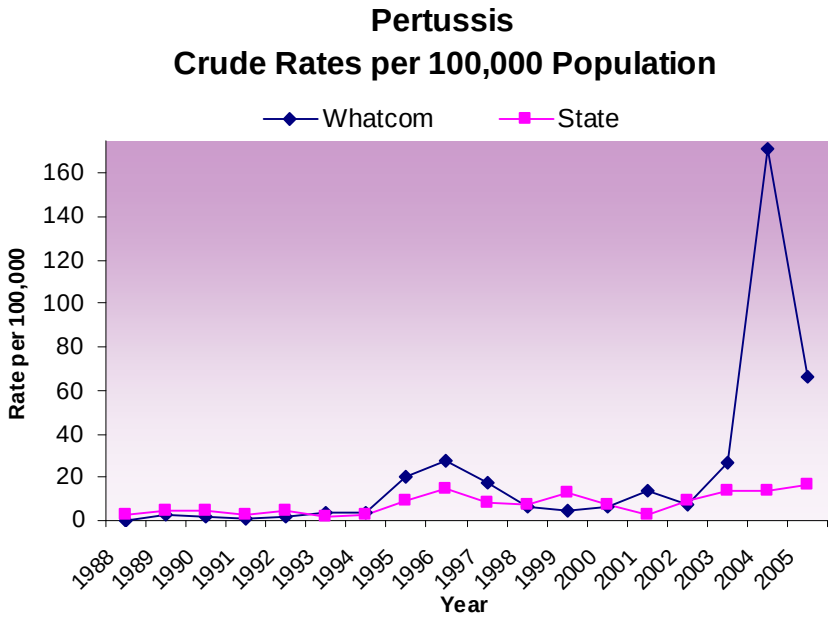
Pertussis is a highly contagious bacterial infection that causes coughing with little or no fever. Pertussis is most common in infants less than age one, as shown by the following chart. This chart shows pertussis rates in Whatcom County by patient age. The top line of this chart portrays those less than one year old at the time the disease was contracted, demonstrating that pertussis is primarily a disease of the very young. The disease is also most dangerous in infants because the disease may lead to pneumonia, convulsions, and rarely, brain damage or death. Serious complications are less likely, but can occur, in older children and adults. Also, during the 2004 and 2005 Whatcom County outbreaks of pertussis, those infected were primarily adolescents and adults. There have been no deaths from pertussis in Whatcom County in recent years.



Since the early 1940s, childhood vaccination has contributed to a reduction of more than 90 percent in pertussis-related illness and death. Unfortunately, the protection provided by the vaccine wears off in six to ten years, so adolescents and adults can become infected and pass the disease on to infants. This is one of the reasons that pertussis has become more prevalent in recent years and is now a greater concern for the public.

How are we doing?

The Report Card on Health in Washington 2005 noted that there is room for improvement in controlling pertussis statewide, as Washington State received a letter grade of "D" compared to the United States as a whole. Rates were particularly high in Whatcom County in 1995--1997, 2001, 2004, and 2005. In 2004, there were a total of 304 pertussis cases.



Note:
These comparisons may be influenced by variations in diagnosis and reporting by health care providers. Thus, if reporting in Whatcom County is more frequent than in other local health jurisdictions, reported rates will be higher.

Pertussis

Crude Rates & Cases per 100,000 Population

	Whatcom County		Washington State	
Year	Rate per 100,000 Population	# of Cases	Rate per 100,000 Population	# of Cases
1988	0.0	0	2.8	130
1989	2.4	3	4.3	201
1990	1.6	2	4.6	226
1991	0.8	1	3.0	149
1992	1.5	2	4.7	241
1993	3.5	5	1.8	96
1994	3.4	5	2.7	142
1995	20.1	30	9.0	491
1996	27.4	42	14.9	830
1997	17.8	28	8.5	481
1998	6.2	10	7.1	406
1999	4.9	8	12.7	738
2000	6.6	11	7.8	460
2001	13.5	23	3.1	184
2002	7.5	13	9.5	575
2003	26.4	46	13.8	844
2004	170.9	303	13.7	842
2005	66.4	120	16.4	1,026

What remains to be done?

The Health Department investigates all reported suspect cases of pertussis. During the investigation, recommendations are made for treatment of close contacts to prevent further spread of the disease.

Current national efforts to control rising pertussis rates are focused on the development and administration of booster vaccines for adolescents and adults. A new Tdap vaccine was created recently and combines pertussis antigens with tetanus and diphtheria toxoids. On June 30, 2005, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommended DTaP for all persons aged 11-18 and up to age 64. Over time, the administration of the new vaccine will decrease the rate of pertussis and also diminish a source of infection for infants and young children. In addition, the following prevention guidelines are recommended:

PREVENTION GUIDELINES

- ***Children should be fully immunized with the DTaP vaccines, which include pertussis vaccine. By age 7, children should get 5 doses of DTaP.***
- ***Persons with pertussis should stay home and avoid close contact with others until 5 days of antibiotic treatments have been completed at which time they are no longer contagious.***
- ***Those living with or having close contact with someone who has pertussis might need to take antibiotics to prevent becoming infected.***
- ***Persons with any cough illness should avoid contact with infants and expectant mothers, including visiting or working in labor, delivery, and nursery areas of hospitals and in child care settings.***