



## **MEDIA RELEASE** **For immediate release**

Month 27th August 2025

### **Ministry of Health Update on Pertussis/ whooping cough Outbreak – NHEOC Situation Report #2**

The Ministry of Health is responding to the outbreak of Pertussis (Whooping Cough). Between 6th July and 26<sup>th</sup> August 2025, a total of 88 cases have been reported from Tanna Island, Tafea Province and 1 from Shefa Province.

Laboratory testing conducted at the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory (VIDRL) in Australia has confirmed 7 out of 8 samples positive for *Bordetella pertussis*, validating the outbreak. The three infant deaths recorded so far shows a case fatality ratio of 3.4%.

The first case in SHEFA Province was admitted on the 23 August 2025, at the Vanuatu National Hospital with all the clinical signs of pertussis. The 11 month old infant had missed the 10-week immunization, as per the national immunization schedule, highlighting both the potential geographic expansion of the outbreak and the heightened risk for under-immunized populations.

All confirmed cases involve unvaccinated children under five years of age, or those who have not completed their scheduled vaccinations, underscoring the urgent need to improve immunization coverage in the community, and ensure all vaccinations are up to date.

The Ministry has activated national and provincial Health Emergency Operations Centres to coordinate a swift and effective response.

Enhanced surveillance is ongoing with daily data collection from hospitals and community sites. The Ministry is working closely with partners including UNICEF, WHO, the Vanuatu Australia Health Program (VAHP), and VBTC to raise public awareness and promote immunization. Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) teams are working with provincial teams in distributing educational materials and engaging communities through media and outreach activities.

### **Call to Action**

The Ministry urgently calls on all families, especially those with children under 5 years old to:

- Visit nearest health facility for immediate catch-up and routine vaccination.
- Practice good hygiene
- Seek medical attention immediately if you show signs of persistent cough, fever, or breathing difficulties.

Ministry of Health will continue with the following:

- Public Health Response
  - Comprising of Provincial and National officer will continue elevating contact tracing
  - Continued advocacy for urgent vaccination of all children who have not completed their vaccinations
  - Continued resourcing of all health facilities with diagnostic and treatment tools in immediate affected zones, expanding nationally
- Shefa Health Team
  - Health center continues to offer immunizations as per their immunization clinic roster / days
    - George Pompidou (MCH)
    - Kalmer Takau Health Center (Pango)
    - Lapnaporo Dispensary (Holen)
    - Rufare Mauri Health Center (Ifira)
    - St Camille (Nanaburu)
    - Medical center (Namba 2)
- Vanuatu National Hospital
  - A Flu clinic has been set up in the Children's Outpatient area for those showing signs and symptoms consistent with pertussis
  - An Isolation Ward has been setup for admissions

Travelers returning from Tanna are advised to monitor their health and visit a health facility immediately if they or their children feel unwell. Encourage and refer anyone in your community showing signs of illness to seek medical care. Early diagnosis and prompt treatment with antibiotics can reduce severity and prevent further transmission.

Those who are planning to travel to other islands but are unwell please seek medical advice and reconsider you're travelling plans to help stop the spread

**Unvaccinated children are at highest risk.** Parents must act now to protect their children and communities.

## Understanding Pertussis

### What is Pertussis?

Pertussis, or Whooping Cough, is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. It is known for severe coughing fits followed by a "whooping" sound when breathing in. It is especially dangerous for infants and young children.

**Mode of Transmission**

Pertussis spreads through respiratory droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Close contact increases the risk of transmission.

**Symptoms**

Symptoms typically appear 7 to 10 days, but can present as late as 21 days after infection and may include:

- Mild fever
- Runny nose
- Persistent cough that may develop into severe coughing fits with a “whoop” sound
- Vomiting after coughing (especially in children)
- Infants may not cough but may show signs of difficulty breathing or feeding

**Who is at Risk?**

Anyone unvaccinated is at risk. The disease is most dangerous for infants, young children, and unvaccinated pregnant women, who may pass the infection to their babies.

**Treatment**

Pertussis is treated with antibiotics. Consult a doctor before starting treatment. Suspected cases should avoid contact with infants, young children, and pregnant women until at least 5 days of antibiotic treatment have been completed.

**Preventive Measures Including Vaccination**

Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent Pertussis. The Pentavalent vaccine is recommended for all infants and children. If your child is under 5 and has not received their full scheduled vaccinations, visit the nearest health facility immediately.

Additional preventive measures include:

- Good Hygiene: Regular handwashing with soap and water
- Respiratory Etiquette: Cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing
- Avoiding Close Contact: Stay away from infected individuals
- Early Treatment: Seek medical care promptly to reduce transmission risk

The Ministry urges all communities to stay vigilant and ensure vaccinations are up to date to protect against Pertussis.

For more information, please contact the National Health Emergency Operations Center at [nationalhealtheoc@gmail.com](mailto:nationalhealtheoc@gmail.com) or visit the Health Promotions Vanuatu Facebook page.

Incidence Controller

Director of Cooperate, Policy and Planning

Dr: Samuel Tapo Posikai



The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'S. Tapo Posikai', written over a circular official stamp. The stamp is blue and contains the text 'REPUBLIC OF VANUATU' at the top and 'RÉPUBLIQUE DE VANUATU' at the bottom. In the center of the stamp, it reads 'Director of Planning, Policy and Corporate Services'.