



MEDIA RELEASE For immediate release

Friday 8th August 2025

Ministry of Health Update on Suspected Pertussis Cases in Tanna – Situation Report #3

The Ministry of Health is actively responding to the suspected outbreak of Pertussis (Whooping Cough) on Tanna Island, with a total of 13-suspected cases has now been reported. According to the Situation Report dated 7 August 2025, all 13 cases have been recorded at Lenakel Hospital since 21 July 2025. Tragically, two children have died, while five have been discharged, and six remain under treatment in isolation. All affected children are aged 0–5 years and had not received their scheduled pentavalent vaccinations. Laboratory samples have been collected and sent to Vila Central Hospital (VCH) for confirmation.

The Pentavalent vaccine is administered in three doses: Penta 1 at 6 weeks, Penta 2 at 10 weeks, and Penta 3 at 14 weeks of age. It protects against five serious diseases: Pertussis, Diphtheria, Tetanus, Hepatitis B, and Haemophilus influenzae type B. Ensuring infants receive the full recommended schedule is critical to building immunity and preventing life-threatening illnesses such as Pertussis.

Vaccination and Outreach Efforts Intensify

To contain the spread and protect vulnerable populations, the Ministry has continues implementation of a comprehensive vaccination and awareness campaign:

- Routine immunizations are being administered at Lamenu Stadium, Lenakel, for children who missed scheduled doses.
- Mobile Health Teams have been deployed to hotspot communities for community awareness and catch-up vaccinations.
- Between 29 July and 7 August, over 250 vaccine doses have been administered, including Penta, OPV, PCV, and MMR.
- Door-to-door awareness and immunization drives are planned across all area councils in the coming weeks.

Vaccination and Outreach Efforts Intensify

To contain the spread and protect vulnerable populations, the Ministry has launched a comprehensive vaccination and awareness campaign:

- Routine station immunizations are being administered at Lamenu Stadium, Lenakel, Tanna, for children who missed scheduled doses.
- Mobile Health Teams have been deployed to hotspot communities including Imaia, Ianapik, Green Point, and Ianruan for community awareness and vaccination catch up.
- Over 250 vaccine doses have been administered between 29 July and 7 August, including Penta, OPV, PCV, and MMR.
- Community Engagement Teams will be conducting door-to-door awareness and immunization drives in the following weeks.

Hospital Preparedness and Treatment

- As a control measure, suspected cases are placed in isolation for treatment.
- Efforts are implemented with the support from national referral hospital to strengthen health workforce and service capacity in Tanna.

Public Health Messaging and Events

Health promotion activities are aligned with national events:

- The National Arts Festival feature vaccination stations and information booths.
- Mass media campaigns via radio, posters, and community forums are reinforcing hygiene practices and early health-seeking behavior.
- IEC materials including brochures and posters have been distributed to support awareness efforts.

Call to Action

The Ministry urges all families, especially those with children under 5, to:

- If in Tanna, visit Lamenu Stadium or the nearest health facility for vaccination.
- At event sites for the National Arts festival, visit the mobile teams with your children for a vaccination catch up and receive up to date information.
- Practice good hygiene and cover mouth and nose with a tissue or elbow when coughing or sneezing.
- Seek medical attention immediately if symptoms such as persistent cough, fever, or breathing difficulties appear.
- Parents in other parts of Vanuatu should ensure that all children under 5 years of age who are unvaccinated or have incomplete vaccinations are taken to the nearest health facility as soon as possible.
- 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.

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.

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