

PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH) ALERT

Information for NSW Pharmacists and Pharmacy managers



Health

1. Pertussis is increasing across NSW, particularly among school aged children.
2. Increased demand for azithromycin and clarithromycin is likely to occur, and continue into 2019.
3. Despite changes to some products and producers, azithromycin and clarithromycin are available from stockists in NSW, and stocks are plentiful.

Summary

Pertussis epidemics commonly occur every three to four years, and it is anticipated that cases will continue to increase into 2019. Identification, isolation, and appropriate treatment of symptomatic cases and contacts can help to prevent spread. This is likely to result in ongoing, increased prescription of the antibiotics used in the treatment of pertussis, and NSW pharmacies are urged to consider this in their stock ordering now, and into 2019.

Suspect, Test & Treat – potential prescription increases

- Alerts have been distributed to NSW medical practitioners encouraging testing and appropriate treatment of suspected pertussis cases and contacts.
- This is likely to result in increased prescription of antibiotics for the treatment of pertussis
- Therapeutic Guidelines recommend:
 - Azithromycin OR
 - Clarithromycin OR
 - Trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole
- There is no clinical evidence to support the use of roxithromycin for pertussis, and erythromycin is not recommended due to dosing and tolerability.

Recent changes to products and producers

- Zithromax[®] brand azithromycin 500mg tablets are unavailable until February 2019; however Sandoz and Arrow brand azithromycin (500mg) remains available.
- Pfizer brand azithromycin suspension stocks have been replenished following a recent shortage.
- Mylan brand clarithromycin suspension may be unavailable.
- Apotex no longer produce clarithromycin (500mg or 250mg tablets); however Arrow and Sandoz brand 250mg tablets are available.
- Bactrim[®] brand trimethoprim/sulfamethoxazole suspension has been discontinued, and increased demand on Septrin[®] suspension has resulted in reduced stock.
- NSW pharmacies are advised to contact wholesalers with whom they hold accounts to access stock.

Recommend vaccination against pertussis

- The National Immunisation Program funds pertussis vaccination of: children at 6 weeks, 4, 6 and 18 months and 4 years of age; in the first year of high school; and pregnant women in the third trimester of every pregnancy, preferably at 28 weeks.
- Boosters are required every 10 years and funded for health care workers in the NSW public health system.
- Boosters every 10 years are recommended for:
 - People who work with children and pregnant women (e.g. childcare workers, other health care workers) and people in regular contact with children and pregnant women (e.g. grandparents, older siblings)
- From 1 January 2019 authorised NSW pharmacists can administer pertussis vaccine to people over 16 years of age.

Further Information:

Contact your local public health unit on **1300 066 055**.

See the NSW Health pertussis website:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/whoopingcough/Pages/default.aspx>

See the NSW Health FAQs for pharmacist delivered vaccination:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/immunisation/Pages/pharmacist-vaccination-expansion.aspx>

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21 December 2018

H18/117753