

Whooping cough cases surging towards 70-year high in US

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Cases of whooping cough—or pertussis as it's more formally known—have been quietly but strongly surging to pre-pandemic levels and beyond. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Nationally Notifiable Disease Surveillance System (NNDSS) found there have been 8,845 cases of pertussis in the United States so far this year, and the number is rapidly expanding.

According to a study published in the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ), when extrapolated out for the remainder of 2025, the total number of cases of whooping cough will very likely exceed the 74,715 cases seen in 1948, the year the pertussis vaccine was first introduced. The number of cases so far this year already exceeds the total number seen in any year between 1968 and 2001.

Pertussis is a respiratory disease caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. It typically causes violent bouts of coughing that leave its victims desperately gasping for air between coughing fits. This often results in a high-pitched sound as the victim draws breath, or “whooping” sound, giving the disease its informal, common name.

Oftentimes, the coughing is so violent that it causes rib fractures. The broken ribs can then cause punctures of the lung, known in medical terms as pneumothorax. Pneumothorax is a medical emergency.

The mortality rate in infants (less than one year old) is 2 percent and this age group accounts for 96 percent of deaths due to pertussis. Fully one third of infants with pertussis require hospitalization. Antibiotics are not curative and are given primarily to reduce transmission from infected to uninfected individuals.

Last year, there were 35,435 cases of pertussis, the highest level seen since 2012. Of those, 7,689 (21.7 percent) were in children aged 6 months to 6 years. Of that age group, 5,696 (74.1 percent) were either

unvaccinated, under vaccinated, or had an unknown vaccination status. That means that 25.9 percent of young children who contracted the disease were fully vaccinated.

This year's surge in cases so far is concentrated in Pacific, Mountain, and Midwestern states. The state of Washington leads the nation with 917 cases followed by Oregon with 617 cases and Michigan with 525 cases.

Texas, which is the epicenter of a large ongoing measles outbreak, has reported only 11 cases of pertussis thus far in 2025. This number is improbably low given that Texas reported 1,156 cases total and 108 cases by this point last year.

The overall numbers of pertussis cases have risen dramatically in the 21st century due to the impact of the anti-vaccination movement. Per CDC data, vaccination rates for pertussis were only approximately 80 percent of children 24 months old for the years 2010-2019. The CDC recommends vaccination rates of 95 percent to prevent transmission levels resulting in outbreaks.

Unlike measles vaccination, the childhood pertussis vaccinations do not provide lifelong immunity. Pertussis is combined with other vaccines, and the most common booster for adults is the tetanus, diphtheria, and acellular pertussis or Tdap vaccine. According to CDC data, in 2019 only 43.6 percent of adults 18 years old or older received this booster. All adults are urged to insist on a Tdap booster if they have not received one in the last 10 years.

Since 2019, with the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a massive surge in anti-vaccination propaganda. Trump named one of the leading anti-vax charlatans, Robert F. Kennedy Jr, to the position of Secretary of Health and Human Services, a clear signal of the intentional destruction of all public health programs.

Kennedy was previously chair of the Children's Health Defense organization, a notorious anti-vaccination outlet. Children's Health Defense until recently operated a website that appeared identical to the CDC's own site, logos and all, and contained anti-vaccine misinformation. The site was only taken down after the *New York Times* inquired about it and its associated social media posts.

As HHS secretary, Kennedy has continued his anti-vaccination and anti-science, anti-public health advocacy. He has downplayed the risks of measles, inflated the risks of the measles vaccine and other vaccines, and promoted quack treatments and preventatives for measles such as vitamin A and aerosolized budesonide.

The net effect of these and other anti-vaccination propaganda campaigns is staggering. A recent KFF tracking poll found that 63 percent of adults overall and 61 percent of parents specifically were aware of the false claim that vaccines cause autism. The percentage of adults who had heard the false claim that the measles vaccine is worse than actually getting the measles increased by 15 percentage points in the last year alone, from 18 percent to 33 percent.

With respect to the false claim, "The measles, mumps, rubella vaccines, also known as the MMR vaccines have been proven to cause autism in children," 24 percent of adults believe it to be definitely or probably true. Another 41 percent of adults rate it as probably false and only 34 percent rate it definitely false.

Fully 25 percent of adults rate the false claim, "Vitamin A can prevent measles infections," as true, while 48 percent rate it as probably false and only 27 percent rate it as definitely false.

The sustained barrage of anti-science, anti-public health messaging on behalf of the ruling class is thus producing its intended effect, which is growing. The ruling class wants to eliminate the societal costs of manufacturing and administering vaccines, which are not profitable enough in the eyes of big pharma.

Here the irrationality of the profit system is on full display. The profit motive actually hinders the development and distribution of medicines that not only keep the workers healthy—whose labor is the source of all value—but keep the capitalists healthy as well.

The ruling class has no way out of these

contradictions of capitalism, which are growing tenser day by day. The only solution is for the working class, on its own independent political program, to replace capitalist, for-profit medicine with socialized medicine, as part a broader struggle for a socialist economy that values human life over private profits.



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