

Date: January 10, 2014

Dear Parent/Guardian:

It has come to our attention that your child may have been exposed to a person who has pertussis (whooping cough).

Pertussis is a highly contagious disease that is spread through the air when an infected person sneezes or coughs. Pertussis begins with cold symptoms and a cough which becomes much worse over 1-2 weeks. Symptoms usually include a long series of coughs (“coughing fits”) followed by a whooping noise. However, older children, adults and very young infants may not develop the whoop. People with pertussis may have a series of coughs followed by vomiting, turning blue, or difficulty catching their breath. The cough is often worse at night and cough medicines usually do not help alleviate the cough. The disease can be very severe and, although deaths are rare, they do occur especially in infants less than one year of age. Please refer to the enclosed fact sheet for more information on pertussis.

**The Pennsylvania Department of Health strongly recommends the following:**

- **If your child is coughing, promptly contact your child’s doctor.** Explain to the doctor your child may have been exposed to a case of pertussis and needs to be evaluated. Your child’s doctor may obtain a nasopharyngeal culture to test for pertussis. In addition, if the doctor suspects pertussis, an antibiotic will be given to your child to help him or her get well faster and to lower the chance of spreading the disease to others. Your child will be able to return to school after completing the first 5 days of the medication. It is very important that upon returning to school your child continues taking his or her medication until completed.
- If your child is diagnosed with pertussis, all household members and other close contacts should also be treated with antibiotics regardless of their age or vaccination status.
- Making sure that children receive all their shots on time is the best way to control pertussis in the future. Diphtheria Tetanus acellular Pertussis (DTaP) vaccine is given to children under age 7 years of age. Children should receive one dose of DTaP vaccine at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, and between 15-18 months of age. In addition, one dose is needed before starting school. If you are not sure your child is properly immunized, promptly contact his or her doctor.
- The combination tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis vaccine (Tdap) is recommended for children ages 7 through 10 (if not fully vaccinated) and adolescents and adults as a one-time dose. It is also recommended during EACH pregnancy to protect the newborn infant.
- Anyone eligible for Tdap may receive it regardless of interval since the most recent tetanus containing vaccine.

If you or your doctor has a question about pertussis, please call the Pennsylvania Department of Health at 1-877-PA-HEALTH.