

**Communicable Disease Epidemiology
and Immunization Section**

401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 900
Seattle, WA 98104-1818

206-296-4774 Fax 206-296-4803

TTY Relay: 711

www.kingcounty.gov/health

Public Health 
Seattle & King County

May 7, 2012

To District Nurses and School Nurses in King County,

Our region is experiencing an epidemic of pertussis. In King County, there were more cases of pertussis reported in the first 3 months of 2012 than for all of 2011. Fortunately, pertussis is not a cause of hospitalization or death in school age children. Because young infants have the highest risk of severe disease, **the primary public health goal of pertussis response is to prevent transmission of pertussis to infants and pregnant women.**

Public Health requests that King County school nurses:

- Ensure that all students have completed the vaccines required for school attendance.
- Recommend to students and staff with suspected pertussis that they see their health care provider for evaluation.
- Exclude students and staff diagnosed with pertussis from school until:
 - 5 days of appropriate antibiotic therapy for pertussis are completed, *or*
 - 21 days has passed since the onset of cough, or cough has completely resolved
- **Report only laboratory-confirmed cases of pertussis among students and staff to Public Health.** If a case has not been laboratory confirmed, you do not need to report. When Public Health investigates reports of pertussis, we ensure the patient is receiving appropriate treatment, identify household contacts and close contacts at high risk for pertussis who need prophylactic antibiotics, and inform the patient or parent of exclusion policies. **Public Health will notify district health services supervisors of reported pertussis cases among students and staff, but will not notify individual schools.**
- Use the pertussis fact sheet and a pertussis school exposure notification letter template when you wish to notify families of pertussis reports in your school. **Public Health does not require and will not routinely issue pertussis contact notification letters.** Consider notification at your discretion based on the burden of ill students and staff and when there is an increased risk that ill students may have contact with infants or pregnant women.
- Educate students, staff, and families about pertussis either by distributing the Public Health letter to families with information on pertussis, or running an article in your school newsletter with similar content.

Our pertussis factsheet, pertussis exclusion guidance table, letter for families with general information on pertussis, notification letter template, newsletter article template, flyer, and other pertussis resources can be downloaded from our pertussis webpage (www.kingcounty.gov/health/cd - click on either "Pertussis" or "P"). Thank you for all you do to protect your students' health. If you have additional questions about pertussis, please call 206-296-4774.

Sincerely,



Jeff Duchin, MD

Chief, Communicable Disease Epidemiology & Immunization Section

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**Public Health Recommendations for Exclusion from School
Due to Suspected or Confirmed Pertussis**

Because protection from pertussis vaccination decreases over time, vaccination status does not affect testing, treatment, or exclusion recommendations. School personnel should continue to follow their usual procedures for evaluating and/or excluding students and staff for symptoms of other illnesses not described in this guidance.

Symptoms	Action
No symptoms	No exclusion
Upper respiratory symptoms without cough	No exclusion
Cough < 7 days in persons at higher risk of transmitting pertussis to infants: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pregnant women in the 3rd trimester• Close contact with infants or pregnant women	Recommend health care provider evaluation for pertussis
Symptoms of suspected pertussis: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cough < 7 days in a close contact of a pertussis case or with a person with prolonged cough illness• Cough \geq 7 days in persons with no or low-grade fever and any of the following: paroxysms, post-tussive vomiting, inspiratory whoop• Cough \geq 14 days with no or low-grade fever and no alternative diagnosis	Recommend health care provider evaluation for pertussis
Cough and pertussis suspected by health care provider and/or confirmed by a positive laboratory test such as culture or PCR.	Exclude from school until: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 5 days of appropriate antibiotic therapy for pertussis are completed, <i>or</i>▪ 21 days has passed since the onset of cough, or cough has completely resolved Consider notifying families of close contacts if any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ you suspect that ill students have had contact with infants or pregnant women▪ there is more than one confirmed case or multiple coughing students in a group (class, team, program)▪ there are multiple cases in the school.



Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

☐ WHAT IS IT?

- ✓ Pertussis (“whooping cough”) is a highly contagious bacterial infection that causes a severe cough.

☐ SYMPTOMS

- ✓ Symptoms appear 6 to 21 days (average 7-10 days) after exposure to an infected person.
- ✓ Pertussis may start with cold symptoms or a dry cough followed by episodes of severe coughing. Gagging or vomiting may occur after severe coughing spells. Cough may be worse at night. The person may look and feel healthy between coughing episodes. Fever is absent or mild.
- ✓ Immunized school children, adolescents, and adults often have milder illness than young children.
- ✓ Infants with pertussis may not develop a severe cough. They may only have a mild cough, decreased feeding, and may have difficulty breathing or turn bluish.

☐ HOW IS IT SPREAD?

- ✓ Pertussis is spread through droplets from the mouth and nose when a person with pertussis coughs, sneezes, or talks.
- ✓ Untreated, persons with pertussis can spread the infection for several weeks.
- ✓ Adults, older children, and healthcare workers with unrecognized pertussis can spread the infection to others, including young children and pregnant women.

☐ WHO GETS IT?

- ✓ Anyone who is exposed to the bacteria can get pertussis.
- ✓ Pertussis vaccine prevents severe disease in young infants, but even a vaccinated person can get pertussis.
- ✓ Pertussis occurs in older children and adults because protection from the vaccine (DTP, DTaP) is not 100% and decreases over time.

☐ WHO IS AT GREATEST RISK?

- ✓ Infants less than one year old have the **highest** risk of severe pertussis, including hospitalization, pneumonia, convulsions, and rarely, brain damage or death.
- ✓ Unimmunized or partly immunized children are also at higher risk for pertussis infection and severe disease.
- ✓ Pregnant women with pertussis near the time of delivery may spread it to their newborns.

☐ TREATMENT

- ✓ Early in the disease, an antibiotic active against pertussis can help decrease transmission to others.
- ✓ Persons treated with antibiotics are no longer contagious after the first 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment have been completed.

☐ PREVENTION

- ✓ Get fully immunized against pertussis.
 - Children should get 5 doses of DTaP vaccine before age 7 years.
 - The following people should get a single dose of Tdap vaccine:
 - Children 7-10 years who are not fully vaccinated against pertussis.
 - Adolescents 11-18 years who have completed the DTP/DTaP series.
 - Pregnant and post-partum women, preferably during the third or late second trimester, after 20 weeks gestation.
 - All adults aged 19 years and older, especially adults who have or anticipate having close contact with infants less than 12 months old.
 - Household members and other close contacts of infants are especially important to get immunized.
- ✓ If you are sick with a cough, avoid contact with infants and expectant mothers. Do not visit or work in labor, delivery, and nursery areas of hospitals, and do not visit or work in child care settings.
- ✓ If you live with or have close contact with someone who has pertussis, you may need antibiotics to prevent pertussis – contact your health care provider.

Available in alternate formats.

Report all King County cases to
Public Health by calling (206) 296-4774.

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Public Health 
Seattle & King County

May 7, 2012

To Parents in King County,

I'm writing to give you information about pertussis, also known as "whooping cough." Washington State and King County are experiencing a widespread pertussis outbreak. In King County, there were 100 confirmed cases of pertussis reported in the first 3 months of 2012 – the highest number reported for this time of year in the past decade, and more than the reports received in all of last year.

Pertussis is a bacterial illness that may begin with symptoms like the common cold: runny nose, scratchy throat, or cough. The cough then gets worse over one to two weeks. Fever is usually mild or absent. Most children and adults don't get seriously ill. But **for infants, pertussis can be life-threatening**. Last year, two infants in Washington state died of pertussis.

There are many things you can do to protect your family and your community from pertussis:

- Make sure that everyone in your family, including teens, parents and grandparents, are up-to-date on all of their shots. There is a one-time pertussis booster shot that all teens and adults should receive if they have not already had it.
- Keep coughing people away from babies and pregnant women.
- See a doctor for symptoms of pertussis. These include:
 - Coughing a week or more with any of the following: uncontrollable fits of coughing, vomiting after coughing, or coughing until out of breath
 - Coughing two weeks or more
 - See a doctor sooner for your cough if someone close to you has recently had pertussis.
 - Infants, pregnant women in their 3rd trimester, and people who have close contact with them should see a doctor for any new or worsening unexplained cough.
- **If you have pertussis, stay out of work and school until you have finished five days of antibiotic medicine for pertussis.** People who have pertussis and don't take antibiotics should stay out of work or school for three weeks, or until the cough is completely gone.
- Cover coughs and sneezes, wash hands frequently with soap and water, and stay home from work or school when sick.

Thank you for taking these steps to protect the health of your family and community. If you have questions about pertussis or are concerned that you might have pertussis, please call your health care provider. For more information you may also call Public Health at 206-296-4774.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey S. Duchin

Chief, Communicable Disease Epidemiology & Immunization Section

Pertussis article template

[Copy and paste into your school newsletter – Microsoft Word version from Public Health Seattle & King County website: www.kingcounty.gov/health/cd]

Pertussis Outbreak in King County

May 7, 2012

Washington State and King County are experiencing a widespread pertussis outbreak. In King County, there were 100 confirmed cases of pertussis reported in the first 3 months of 2012 – the highest number reported for this time of year in the past decade, and more than the reports received in all of last year.

Pertussis is a bacterial illness that may begin with symptoms like the common cold: runny nose, scratchy throat, or cough. The cough then gets worse over one to two weeks. Fever is usually mild or absent. Most children and adults don't get seriously ill. **But for infants, pertussis can be life-threatening.** Last year, two infants in Washington state died of pertussis.

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- Make sure that everyone in your family, including teens, parents and grandparents, are up-to-date on all of their shots. There is a one-time pertussis booster shot that all teens and adults should receive if they have not already had it.
- Keep coughing people away from babies and pregnant women.
- See a doctor for symptoms of pertussis. These include:
 - Coughing a week or more with any of the following: uncontrollable fits of coughing, vomiting after coughing, or coughing until out of breath
 - Coughing two weeks or more
 - See a doctor sooner for your cough if someone close to you has recently had pertussis.
 - Infants, pregnant women in their 3rd trimester, and people who have close contact with them should see a doctor for any new or worsening unexplained cough.
- **If you have pertussis, stay out of work and school until you have finished five days of antibiotic medicine for pertussis.** People who have pertussis and don't take antibiotics should stay out of work or school for three weeks, or until the cough is completely gone.
- Cover coughs and sneezes, wash hands frequently with soap and water, and stay home from work or school when sick.

Thank you for taking these steps to protect the health of your family and community. If you have questions about pertussis or are concerned that you might have pertussis, please call your health care provider. For more information you may also call Public Health at 206-296-4774.

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Pertussis ("whooping cough") is at high levels currently in King County and Washington State: Get protected!

- Pertussis is *very contagious* cough illness. Young infants are at highest risk for severe illness, hospitalization and death from whooping cough.
- In older children & adults, pertussis symptoms can be severe or mild.
- Older children, teens and adults can spread the infection to infants, pregnant women and others.

Vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and others

- Be sure all children, teens & adults are up-to-date with pertussis vaccine.
- Adults should have one dose of the Tdap vaccine to prevent pertussis, especially anyone who will have contact with infants or pregnant women.

If you have pertussis:

- You are still contagious until you have taken 5 days of antibiotics: Stay away from children under 1 year old, pregnant women, and others who have frequent contact with infants.
- Stay home from group activities including work and school until you have completed 5 days of antibiotic treatment or are no longer coughing.

If you have a cough illness:

- Stay away from infants and pregnant women until you are better or diagnosed by a healthcare provider and if needed, treated
- If you have been in contact with someone with pertussis or a prolonged cough illness, OR you have coughing fits, vomiting after coughing, or a "whoops" when you inhale after coughing, OR your cough has lasted 14 days, see your healthcare provider to be evaluated for pertussis
- Always cover your cough and wash hands frequently

For more information, see <http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health.aspx>

[Adapt and customize with your school name, the class/grade/program affected, and dates of exposure]

April 23, 2012

Dear Parents and Staff of [school name]:

I am writing to inform you that children and staff in [class/grade/program/team] may have been exposed to a child with pertussis (whooping cough) between [date range].

Pertussis is a bacterial illness that may begin with symptoms similar to the common cold (runny nose or scratchy throat) or simply a dry cough. The cough usually becomes worse over 1 to 2 weeks. Fever is minimal or absent. Most recover without any complications, but **for infants, pertussis can be life-threatening.**

Antibiotics can reduce the risk of infection if given within 21 days after contact with someone with pertussis. If you are in any of the following groups and have had close contact with a person with pertussis, consult your health care provider to discuss the need for antibiotic treatment to prevent pertussis:

- Infants younger than one year of age
- Pregnant women near the time of delivery (who could spread it to their newborns)
- Health care workers (who could spread pertussis to their high risk patients and other staff who care for high risk patients)
- People who have close contact with pregnant women, infants, or health care workers

Individuals who are not in the above high risk groups should watch closely for symptoms of pertussis (see attached factsheet). If cold symptoms or a cough develop within three weeks of exposure, please do the following:

- **Avoid close contact with others until you are evaluated by your health care provider.**
- Tell your health care provider that you or your child has a cough and may have been exposed to pertussis. It may be helpful to show this letter. Your health care provider might recommend a test for the pertussis bacteria, and if necessary prescribe appropriate antibiotics.
- **If diagnosed with pertussis, avoid close contact with others and stay out of school or other social settings until 5 days of antibiotic treatment have been completed.**

This recent case of pertussis is a good reminder of the importance of keeping pertussis vaccination up to date – please review your family's vaccination records. If you have any questions about vaccines or pertussis please call your health care provider or contact Public Health at (206) 296-4774.

Sincerely,

[name/title]