

MONTOURSVILLE AREA HIGH SCHOOL

6/12/2015

To Whom It May Concern:

It has come to our attention that you/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:

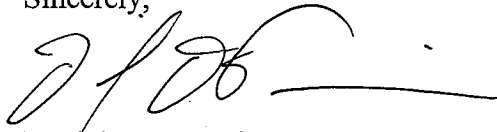
- If you/your child is coughing, promptly contact your/your child's doctor. Explain to the doctor you/your child has been exposed to a case of pertussis and needs to be evaluated. Your child's doctor may obtain a nasopharyngeal culture to test for pertussis. In addition, if the doctor suspects pertussis, an antibiotic will be given to your child to help 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 you/your child are/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. In children, diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis vaccine (DTaP) is only given to those 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 (on or after the 4th birthday). Check with your pediatrician to see if your child is eligible for another dose of DTaP in the accelerated schedule. 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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Taormina', followed by a horizontal line.

Daniel D. Taormina
Principal



PERTUSSIS

(Whooping Cough)

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a contagious disease involving the lungs and airways. It is caused by a bacterium, *Bordetella pertussis*, that is found in the nose, mouth, and throat of an infected person. More than 100 cases are reported each year in Pennsylvania, mostly in children. Other cases of pertussis occur but are not diagnosed, especially in adults.

Who gets pertussis?

Pertussis can occur at any age.

How do you get pertussis?

People get pertussis by breathing in droplets from the nose and mouth of already infected persons. Older children and adults may have milder disease and may spread the disease to unimmunized infants and young children. An infected person is most contagious at the beginning of the disease. If untreated, an infected person can spread pertussis for up to 3 weeks after coughing starts. Antibiotic treatment limits contagiousness to five days after treatment is started.

How soon do symptoms start?

Symptoms usually start 5 to 10 days after exposure to another person with the disease, but may take as long as 20 days to start.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Pertussis begins as a mild illness like the common cold. Sneezing, runny nose, low-grade fever, and mild coughing progress to severe coughing. Some persons have episodes of rapid coughing followed by a high-pitched whoop as they take a deep breath. However, not everyone with pertussis has a whoop, especially very young infants. Severe cough may continue for many weeks despite proper treatment. Symptoms may be milder in older children and adults. However, pertussis can be a serious disease, especially in infants and young children. Complications can include pneumonia, dehydration, seizures, encephalopathy (a disorder of the brain), and death.

How is pertussis treated?

Antibiotics such as erythromycin may be useful early in the disease. Antibiotics are particularly helpful in reducing spread of the disease to other persons. However, once severe symptoms begin, antibiotics may not have any effect on symptoms.

How can pertussis be prevented?

The single best control measure is adequate vaccination of children. The pertussis vaccine is usually given together with other vaccines such as diphtheria and tetanus (DTaP vaccine). Recent changes in the pertussis vaccine have improved its safety while keeping a high level of protection. Children should be routinely immunized at ages 2, 4, 6, and 15 months, and again at 4-6 years.

Before 2005, the only booster available contained tetanus and diphtheria (Td), and was recommended for adolescents and adults every 10 years. Today, there are boosters for adolescents and adults that contain tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis, Tdap. Pre-teens going to the doctor for their regular check-up at age 11 or 12 should get a dose of Tdap. Adults who didn't get Tdap as a pre-teen should get one dose of Tdap instead of the Td booster. Pregnant women should get a dose of Tdap during **each** pregnancy.

When pertussis does occur, preventive antibiotic treatment is sometimes recommended for household and other close contacts of the person with pertussis.