



THE COUNTY OF CHESTER



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Dear School Communities,

The Chester County Health Department has identified pertussis ("whooping cough") outbreak in public and private schools. The outbreak is not limited to our County as the entire Southeast PA Region is impacted.

In Chester County we have over 25 cases and expect the cases to increase due to the highly contagious nature of this respiratory virus. Originally the outbreak was limited to one school district but has now spread to multiple districts and beyond high school students.

The Health Department is working to limit the transmission through a coordinated response among healthcare providers, schools, families and surrounding health departments. As with any outbreak, it is important for staff and families to understand the virus and their role in limiting its spread.

Pertussis Summary:

Pertussis is a very serious respiratory infection in the lungs and breathing tubes that can affect children and adults, even those who are fully vaccinated. It is highly contagious and can live in the body for up to 21 days before coughing starts. The disease can be very severe and, although deaths are rare, they do occur, especially in infants less than one year of age. Pertussis is spread through the air when an infected person sneezes or coughs.

Pertussis Symptoms:

- Pertussis starts with common cold-like symptoms and a mild, occasional cough.
- The cough becomes more persistent, causing coughing fits.
- The cough may become violent, causing vomiting in some cases.
- Some people experience a whooping noise, but many do not.
- Some people have difficulty catching their breath.
- The cough may last up to 8 weeks or longer.
- Occasionally, people can get pertussis even if they have been fully vaccinated.

Immediate Recommendations:

- If your child has a cough:

- Make an appointment with your doctor as soon as possible and ask to be tested for pertussis. Bring this letter to tell the doctor that you may have been exposed to pertussis.
- If the doctor thinks it could have pertussis, they may prescribe an antibiotic. Your child can return to school and activities after they have been on antibiotics for five (5) days and the cough has improved. In certain cases, doctors may also give antibiotics to everyone who lives in the household to prevent pertussis.

Note: When in doubt, please visit your doctor if your child develops any symptoms of pertussis!

Prevention Recommendations:

- Regardless of systems, contact your doctor as soon as possible to discuss the need for antibiotics to prevent pertussis if:
 - your child has a health problem that may be worsened with pertussis,
 - your child lives with any of the following people:
 - someone who is pregnant;
 - a baby younger than 12 months old;
 - anyone with health problems that may be worsened with pertussis, such as severe asthma or a weak immune system.
- Be sure you and your child are fully vaccinated.
 - Children should receive one dose of the DTaP vaccine at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 15-18 months, and at 4-6 years.
 - A Tdap booster is given at age 11.
 - Adults should also receive a Tdap vaccine.
 - Pregnant women should receive a Tdap with each pregnancy.
 - If you don't know whether you or your child(ren) are fully vaccinated, call your doctor.

The DTaP and Tdap vaccines are available at doctor's offices, health care centers and immunization providers. The Chester County Health Department offers no-cost vaccine to individuals who meet eligibility requirements.

If you have questions or need additional information, please call the Chester County Health Department at 610-344-6452.



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