

April 9, 2008

Dear Parent/Guardian:

We have had 2 cases of suspected pertussis (whooping cough) identified in our school. Pertussis is a highly contagious disease that is spread through the air by a cough or sneeze. Pertussis begins with cold symptoms and a cough, which become much worse over 1-2 weeks. Symptoms usually include a long series of coughing fits followed by a whooping noise. However, older children, adult and very young infants may not develop the whoop. There is generally only a slight fever. People with pertussis may have a series of severe coughing fits followed immediately by vomiting, turning blue, or difficulty catching breath. The cough is often worse at night, and cough medicines usually do not help alleviate the cough.

If your child has been around someone with pertussis, s/he might become sick with the disease. This is especially true if your child is not up-to-date with his/her pertussis vaccine shots. Even if your child's shots are up-to-date, s/he might still get pertussis.

If your child has been in contact with someone with pertussis, antibiotics prescribed by your doctor may prevent him/her from becoming ill. If your child is already sick, giving antibiotics early can help your child get well faster and lower the chances of spreading the disease to others.

Please consider the following New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services recommendations:

1. Infants under one year old, especially those under six months, are most likely to have severe symptoms if they develop pertussis. When possible, young infants should be kept away from people with a cough. **Infants with any coughing illness should be seen promptly by their doctor.**
2. Pertussis vaccine has until recently, been given only to children under 7 years old. However, a new adolescent and adult pertussis booster vaccine is now available for persons ages 10 to 64 years. If you have children who have not been completely immunized against pertussis (especially infants under one year) we recommend you now talk to your child's doctor about the benefits of vaccination.
3. If your child comes down with cold symptoms that include a cough, talk to your child's doctor immediately. Tell the doctor that pertussis has been identified in your child's school.
4. It is generally recommended that those persons having close contact with a pertussis case receive antibiotics from their doctor to help prevent them from getting pertussis.
5. Do not send your child to school if s/he has any signs or symptoms of pertussis.

We will continue to monitor the situation at school and if additional actions to control the spread of pertussis among pupils become necessary, we will again notify the parents.

If you have general concerns or questions about pertussis, you may contact the local health department at (856) 262-4183. If you have specific concerns or questions about your child's health, contact your health care provider.

Sincerely,

Rosemarie T. Farrow  
Principal