



April 19, 2012

**Summary:**

- Pertussis is a cough illness caused by a bacteria that is circulating in Washington County and its schools.
- The infection is most dangerous in infants under one year of age.
- If you or your child have symptoms of pertussis, stay home and consult with your health care provider.
- The best way to prevent pertussis is for people of all ages to be up to date on pertussis vaccines.

Dear Parents, Guardians and School staff:

You may have seen in the news that there is an increase in pertussis (whooping cough) infections this year in Northwest Oregon and Southwest Washington. Many schools in Washington County have had one or more individuals sick with pertussis. The infection is caused by a bacteria and is most dangerous – and in some cases life-threatening - for infants less than one year age. **The most effective way to prevent pertussis is for children, teens and adults to be fully up to date on pertussis vaccines.**

Because pertussis is circulating widely, Washington County Public Health and Washington County schools would like everyone to be aware of the following recommendations to prevent pertussis infections in our communities:

1. If you or your child have symptoms of pertussis - as described below - please stay home from school and consult with your health care provider.
2. Call the regional public health pertussis reporting number at 503-988-3663, x26594, to let us know if your child has been diagnosed with pertussis.
3. Review and update your immunization record. Current recommendations for pertussis vaccination are as follows:
  - a. Children who have received all 4 primary Dtap doses before their fourth birthday should receive a 5<sup>th</sup> dose of Dtap (through age 6).
  - b. Anyone between the ages of 7-9 years of age who are NOT fully immunized against pertussis should receive the Tdap vaccine now.
  - c. Those age 10 – 64 years old who have not yet received the Tdap vaccine should get it now.
  - d. Adults over age 65 and pregnant women should consult with their personal health care provider about getting the Tdap vaccine.

**What is pertussis?**

Pertussis or whooping cough is a contagious disease of the respiratory tract, caused by bacteria found in the mouth, nose, and throat of an infected person. Pertussis is spread through direct contact with nose and throat mucus and airborne droplets. Immunization is the most effective way to prevent the spread of this illness. Prescription antibiotics are also available to help decrease the spread of pertussis. Pertussis can be a serious, even life-threatening illness in infants less than 12 months old.

**Washington County Department of Health and Human Services**

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**Symptoms:**

Symptoms of pertussis include cold-like symptoms followed in one to two weeks by a severe cough that can last for weeks to months. During coughing attacks, children may gag, gasp or strain to inhale, making the high-pitched whooping sound. This may be followed by vomiting or exhaustion. Fever is usually absent or minimal. Pertussis can be life-threatening in infants less than 12 months of age. Women in the third trimester of pregnancy should also be on the watch for pertussis symptoms because medication can decrease the risk of spreading the infection to newborns. It is still possible to get sick with pertussis if you have had all the necessary vaccines, but the risk of infection is much greater in those who are not up to date on their pertussis vaccines.

**Vaccine:**

Young children are protected against pertussis by getting a series of vaccines called Dtap which contain vaccine against Diphtheria, Tetanus, and pertussis. After age 7 the vaccine for pertussis is called Tdap and is a tetanus booster that includes protection against pertussis. The Tdap is an important booster for adolescents and adults against pertussis and can be given anytime – regardless of when the last Tetanus booster was done. Tdap is considered safe for adults over age 65 and pregnant women who are at least five months along.

**Prevention:**

- Now is a good time to review your and your child’s immunization records to see if you and your household members are current on all vaccinations.
- Frequently wash hands with soap and water.
- Stay at home when ill.
- Cover your cough and sneeze.

**Resources:**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has an excellent website with additional information. Go to [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) and type “pertussis” in the search box.

If you have further questions, please call 503-988-3663, x26594.

Sincerely,

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