

## Pertussis Advisory

This is to advise you that there has been an increase in the number of cases of whooping cough state wide. At this time, there are no recommendations for antibiotics among classmates or other students in the school, but parents and guardians should be aware of the signs and symptoms of pertussis. If your child has symptoms or develops symptoms, testing is recommended and five days of antibiotic treatment will be required before being able to return to school.

- What is pertussis?** Pertussis (also called whooping cough) is a disease caused by bacteria that spreads from person to person with close contact. Pertussis is often mild in older children and adults, but can cause serious problems in infants.
- Who gets pertussis?** In MA, pertussis is most common among people 10-20 years old who have lost the protection they got from childhood vaccines. Infants are also likely to get the disease since they are often too young to have full protection from the vaccine.
- What are the symptoms?** Pertussis is a cough illness whose symptoms can range from mild to severe. It usually begins with cold-like symptoms, with a runny nose, sneezing and dry cough. After two weeks of cold-like symptoms, the cough slowly gets worse. The next stage, which may last from four to six weeks, may be marked by coughing spells that are uncontrollable and may be followed by vomiting. Between spells, the person may appear to be well and usually there is no fever. These typical symptoms are more common in infants and young children. Vaccinated children, teens and adults may have milder symptoms that can seem like bronchitis.
- How is pertussis spread?** The germs that cause pertussis live in the nose, mouth and throat and are sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks. Other people can then inhale the germs in the droplets produced by the person with pertussis. Touching a tissue or sharing a cup used by someone with the disease can also spread the disease. The first symptoms usually appear 7 to 10 days after a person is exposed, although sometimes people do not get sick for up to 21 days after their last exposure.
- How is pertussis diagnosed?** A doctor may think a patient has pertussis based on their symptoms, however, a culture or blood test are the only ways to be sure. The culture is taken by swab from the back of the nose if the patient has been coughing for two weeks or less. In children 11 years and older, a blood test can be done when the cough has persisted for longer than two weeks.
- How can pertussis be prevented?** Although DTP or DTaP vaccine (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis) usually provides adequate protection against pertussis to children, the effects of the vaccine wear off over time, leaving most teens and adults at risk of the disease. If your child is less than 7 years of age, they should be up to date with DTaP (check with you provider if you are unsure). A new vaccine for teens and adults, called Tdap, is now recommended to give protection against pertussis in these age groups and is given as a single "booster" dose.
- Antibiotics are sometimes given to help prevent illness in the contacts of someone with pertussis, or to decrease infectiousness in someone with pertussis. After five days of

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treatment a case is no longer contagious.

**What should I do?**

If your child is **symptomatic**, he/she should be tested for pertussis by your family's health care provider and, per Massachusetts's requirements, must begin antibiotic treatment before returning to school. Please contact your health care provider and bring this advisory with you.

Students who are symptomatic and who have had close contact with a case of pertussis will be excluded from school until they have completed 5 days of appropriate antibiotic therapy.

**If you have any questions, please call your family physician, the school nurse, the local board of health or the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at (617) 983-6800.**