Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Dear Parents and Staff,
An individual who attends Narellan Vale Public School has been recently diagnosed with whooping cough (pertussis). I am writing to provide you with information about this illness and ask that you watch for the symptoms, especially over the next two weeks.

If you/your child develop symptoms, please go to your local doctor as soon as possible taking this letter with you.

A person with whooping cough is infectious for the first 3 weeks of illness but is no longer infectious after 5 days of antibiotic treatment. The coughing can last between one and three months. To help prevent this infection spreading, people who have been diagnosed with pertussis should not attend school until they have completed a five day course of the recommended antibiotics. If antibiotics cannot be taken then they must stay away for 3 weeks after onset of cough.

The people most at risk of severe disease are:
- Infants < 12 months of age, regardless of vaccination status
- Children < 2 years who have received fewer than 3 doses of pertussis vaccine
- Pregnant women in the last month of their pregnancy (because they could infect their newborn).

Most children are immunised against pertussis as it is a standard childhood immunisation. However immunity to the disease is not guaranteed with vaccination in some people and does decrease with time. It is important to note that although your child may be immunised, they may still become infected. Please ensure that younger children at home have their whooping cough immunisations up to date.

For more information, please see the NSW Health whooping cough website: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/PublicHealth/Infectious/whoopingcough/index.asp, the attached whooping cough factsheet or contact the Infectious Diseases Officer at the Public Health Unit on (02) 8778 0855.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]

Dr Stephen Conaty
Director, Public Health Unit
South Western Sydney Local Health District

04/05/2015
Whooping Cough

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What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough can be a life threatening infection in babies. Whooping cough in babies can lead to apnoea (pauses in normal breathing), pneumonia, feeding problems and weight loss, seizures, brain damage and, in some cases, death. Older children and adults can get whooping cough too and pass it on to babies.

What are the symptoms?

- Whooping cough usually begins like a cold with a blocked or runny nose, tiredness, mild fever and a cough.
- The cough gets worse and severe bouts of uncontrollable coughing can develop. Coughing bouts can be followed by vomiting, choking or taking a big gasping breath which causes a "whooping" sound. The cough can last for many weeks and can be worse at night.
- Some newborns may not cough at all but they can stop breathing and turn blue. Some babies have difficulties feeding and can choke or gag.
- Older children and adults may just have a cough that lasts for many weeks. They may not have the whoop.

How is it spread?

- Whooping cough is spread when an infectious person coughs bacteria into the air which can be inhaled by people nearby. If they are not treated early, people with whooping cough are infectious in the first three weeks of their illness.
- Whooping cough spreads easily through families, childcare centres and at school.

Who is at risk?

- Anyone can get whooping cough. People living in the same household as someone with whooping cough are especially at risk.
- Immunisation reduces the risk of infection but immunity fades over time. You can still get whooping cough even if you've been immunised.

How is it prevented?

Whooping cough vaccines provide good protection from infection but immunity fades which means that boosters are needed.

Immunisation for babies

- Babies need to be immunised at 2 months, 4 months and 6 months. The first dose can be given as early as 6 weeks of age.
- Getting your baby vaccinated on time gives them some protection when they are most at risk of severe illness.
- If your baby's vaccines are overdue, see your GP now to catch up.

"Preparing successful 21st Century citizens"
Immunisation for older children

- A whooping cough booster is needed at 4 years of age.
- Check if your child has been vaccinated. Look at their Blue Book, speak to your GP or ring the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register on 1800 653 609.
- A second whooping cough booster is given in high school through the NSW School-based Vaccination Program.

Immunisation for adults

A booster for adults is recommended for:

- Women who are planning a pregnancy, pregnant (third trimester) or post-delivery. These women should discuss their vaccination needs with their doctor as soon as possible.
- Other adult household members, grandparents and carers of infants under 12 months of age.
- Adults working with young children, especially health care and child care workers.
- New mothers in NSW are eligible for free whooping cough vaccine in the public maternity unit after the birth of their children.

If you are a close contact of someone with whooping cough:

- If you have been exposed to someone with whooping cough early in their illness while they are infectious, watch out for symptoms and see your doctor if you get a new cough.
- Some babies and some pregnant women need antibiotics to prevent whooping cough infection if they have had significant contact with an infectious person.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor may ask about your symptoms and whether there you've had any contact with whooping cough. If your doctor thinks you have whooping cough, a swab from the back of the nose or throat can confirm the diagnosis.

How is it treated?

- Some babies may need treatment in hospital or in intensive care.
- Antibiotics are used to treat whooping cough in the early stages and can help prevent spreading whooping cough to others. People who are not treated early with the right antibiotics can spread the infection in the first 3 weeks of their illness. After 5 days of antibiotics, you are normally no longer infectious.
- The cough often continues for many weeks, despite antibiotics.

What is the public health response?

Doctors and laboratories must confidentially notify cases of pertussis to the local Public Health Unit. Public Health Unit staff can advise on the best way to stop further spread. Infectious children are restricted from going to pre-school and school. Unimmunised contacts may be excluded from child care unless they take the special antibiotics.

Identify - Protect - Prevent

NSW Health whooping cough campaign

For further information please call your local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055 or visit the New South Wales Health website www.health.nsw.gov.au