



PERTUSSIS (Whooping Cough) LETTER

Dear Parent / Guardian / Student / Staff,

This letter is to inform you that there is a pertussis (whooping cough) outbreak in Whitman County. Most cases have been identified on the WSU campus, but a few members of the broader community have also tested positive. This letter is meant to provide you with information about pertussis and what you can do to protect yourself and others from pertussis.

What is Pertussis? Pertussis is a contagious bacterial illness that begins with mild symptoms similar to the common cold, such as runny nose and cough. The cough typically worsens over the next 2-3 weeks and people may cough in spasms, or fits, that may be followed by a “whooping” sound. Coughing fits are sometimes followed by vomiting.

- Babies and Children
 - Babies under 1 year of age are especially vulnerable to whooping cough. About 1 in 3 babies younger than 1 year old who get whooping cough need care in the hospital.
 - Infants may not cough, but have dangerous pauses in breathing called “apnea”.
 - Infants and children often have severe coughing spells that make it hard to breathe, eat, drink, and sleep.

How Pertussis is Spread? Pertussis is spread when ill people cough and sneeze near others, especially in close spaces over long periods of time (such as within the same household). Symptoms usually appear within 7-10 days of exposure, but it can be as long as three weeks before symptoms begin.

What to Do if you Develop Symptoms: **Please monitor your health for cold-like symptoms. If you develop a cough, fever, or other signs of respiratory illness, you should be evaluated by a healthcare provider.** Take this letter with you when you visit your provider.

Isolation While Sick: Pertussis is treated with antibiotics. **If treated, a person with pertussis can return to normal activities such as school, work or sports after finishing five (5) days of treatment and although they may continue to cough for many weeks, they are no longer contagious.** Without antibiotics, someone with pertussis is contagious for 3-4 weeks after coughing begins. It is important that ill persons stay home while contagious.

Prevention: **Stay isolated while sick and wear a mask if you need to be around others until you are no longer contagious.** The best means of protecting against pertussis is to keep your vaccinations up to date, including periodic booster shots. Immunity against pertussis decreases as children previously immunized get older. Please check with your healthcare provider to make sure your shots are up to date. Infants and young children are at highest risk for getting very sick with pertussis. **If you work with or live with young children or with someone who is pregnant, please take extra precautions to protect them from getting exposed to pertussis.**



Whooping Cough Vaccine Requirements

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis vaccination for all ages.

In children, DTaP vaccine is given at the following ages:

- 1st dose at 2 months of age
- 2nd dose at 4 months of age
- 3rd dose at 6 months of age
- 4th dose at 15 to 18 months of age
- 5th dose at 4 to 6 years of age

Preteens between ages of 11 to 12 years should get a Tdap vaccine to boost their immunity.

In adults, those who have never received a Tdap vaccine should get one. This should be followed by a Tdap vaccine every 10 years to boost immunity.

In pregnant women, Tdap should be given during the early part of the 3rd trimester of every pregnancy. By doing so, babies are protected from whooping cough in the first few months of life.

During an outbreak it is recommended that you check with your provider to make sure you are up to date on your DTaP or Tdap vaccines. According to OSPI guidelines, children who are not up to date on their DTaP or Tdap vaccines may be excluded from school for a minimum of 21 days if they are exposed to pertussis.

DTaP and Tdap vaccines are available at Pharmacies, Health Clinics, and Whitman County Public Health (online scheduling is available at our website).

For more information search “Whooping Cough” at the following sites:

- Whitman County Public Health: <https://whitmancountypublichealth.org/>
- Washington State Dept of Health: <https://doh.wa.gov/>
- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/>

If you have further questions, consult your healthcare provider or contact Whitman County Public Health at (509) 332-6752 or DiseasePrevention@whitmancounty.gov.

Sincerely,
Whitman County Disease Prevention Team