



Public Health
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School district talking points for pertussis

The following talking points may be useful as the basis for letters to parents, for background in talking to the media, and for other written or verbal communications in the event of a pertussis diagnosis at school:

Overview of pertussis

- Pertussis is a highly contagious disease that is spread through the air by coughing. A person is at risk for exposure to pertussis if he/she has spent an hour or more within 6 feet of a contagious person.
- Pertussis usually begins with cold-like symptoms and a cough that worsens over 1-2 weeks. Symptoms may include coughing fits followed by a “whooping” noise, vomiting, cyanosis (turning blue) or the inability to catch one’s breath. The cough is often worse at night and cough medicines usually do not help eliminate the cough. Usually, persons infected with pertussis do not have a fever.
- Adults and children may catch pertussis, **even if they have had all or some of their immunizations (DtaP)**. In older children and adults the symptoms may be only a persistent cough which is worse at night. This illness is often very severe in small infants. [See attached fact sheet for more details.]

Clark County Public Health recommendations to parents:

- If your child develops pertussis symptoms within the next 3 weeks [following initial diagnosis of pertussis in school], have your child evaluated **promptly** by his/her doctor for pertussis infection. Symptoms may include coughing “fits” followed by a “whooping” noise, vomiting, cyanosis (turning blue) or the inability to catch one’s breath.
- Children and school staff with pertussis must remain out of school until they are no longer contagious. This means they can return after 5 days of antibiotic treatment or 3 weeks after onset of symptoms.
- Please make sure that your child is current on all pertussis vaccinations whether or not your child was exposed to the ill child. Pertussis vaccines are recommended for both children and adults.
- If you are a woman in the third trimester of pregnancy and have been exposed to pertussis, please speak with your doctor about getting antibiotics for yourself even if you don’t have symptoms; this will prevent exposing your newborn infant to the illness. It is recommended that children under age 1 receive a course of antibiotics if they have been exposed.
- For more information, call your health care provider or call Clark County Public Health at (360) 397-8182

Control measures for school per Clark County Health Officer request/order:

- Exclude children and school staff with pertussis from school until they are no longer contagious. Affected children and staff may return:
 - After completing a 5-day course of antibiotics
 - 3 weeks after onset of coughing symptoms
- Please provide a note from the health care provider to return to school.

Additional Information

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) Web site:
http://www.cdc.gov/dncid/diseases/zoonotic/d/diagn/diagn_0900f3ec80228696
- Washington State Department of Health Web Web site:
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHSPHL/factsheet/pertussis.htm>