



11/15/24

TO: Students, Parents, Faculty, and Staff

SUBJECT: Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Cases of pertussis, also called “whooping cough” have been reported in your school. Pertussis is caused by bacteria infecting the mouth, nose, and throat. It is spread through the air by coughing.

Symptoms can appear 5 to 21 days after infection. Usually only close contacts of someone with Pertussis may become infected. Pertussis **may** start with cold-like symptoms (i.e., sneezing/runny nose) followed by a cough that can gradually become worse. Others may develop the cough without any cold symptoms at all. **Those with Pertussis are most contagious during the beginning, cold-like stage and the first 2 weeks after cough onset.** The cough usually develops into “coughing fits” which can make one gag or even vomit. **Between these “coughing fits” the person appears well.** Coughing in very young children may produce a whooping sound due to trying to catch their breaths (rare in older children). There is generally no fever and coughing may last four weeks or longer. **Adults, teens and vaccinated children often have milder symptoms** that may be confused with bronchitis or asthma. **Please observe your child for the above symptoms for the next 3 weeks.**

If your child comes down with cold symptoms followed by a cough, **it may be necessary to have your child evaluated by a physician.** Tell the doctor that pertussis has been reported in your child’s school and report possible pertussis infections to your school nurse or administration. If your child was seen by a medical provider **and** Pertussis was suspected, **please keep your child at home for the first 5 days of the appropriate antibiotic treatment, or until test results are known.** The most accurate test for diagnosing pertussis is a swab placed through the nose called a nasopharyngeal swab. **Antibiotics given early may minimize severe symptoms and prevent further spread of the disease.**

In Alabama, the “Dtap” Pertussis vaccine is given until 7 years of age. Vaccine protection begins to fade in older children. If you have children less than 7 years old who have not been completely vaccinated for pertussis (particularly babies under one year of age), talk to your child’s doctor about the benefit of vaccination. Make sure children receive their pertussis (Dtap) booster as soon as they **turn 4 years old.** Babies under one year of age and unvaccinated small children are more likely to have severe illness from Pertussis. When possible, babies should be kept away from people with a cough. **Any baby with a coughing illness should be seen by their doctor as soon as possible.**

The pertussis booster “Tdap” (diphtheria, tetanus and acellular pertussis booster) is now available for children (11 years and older) as well as adults. It is **strongly recommended that all adolescents receive the new Tdap vaccine in place of the required Td for high school entrance.** Most pediatricians are already administering this booster as it helps increase

pertussis protection. **Please discuss both the need and availability of a Pertussis booster for your child with your medical provider.**

Thank you.

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