

**Pertussis Disease Alert**  
**Important Notice to Parents**  
<<Date>>

Your child may have been exposed to pertussis, also known as “whooping cough”, at <<School Name>>. Pertussis is an illness spread to others when an infected person sneezes or coughs. **Pertussis may be very severe** in infants and young children (especially those without 3 doses of pertussis vaccine).

Symptoms may appear 7 to 10 days after being in close contact with someone that has pertussis, but can take anywhere from 4 to 21 days. Pertussis begins with cold-like symptoms that may include:

- Runny nose
- Mild coughing
- Low-grade fever

After one to two weeks, coughing becomes more severe and develops into coughing fits (many, rapid coughs) that leave a person out of breath. These fits are often followed by a high-pitched “whooping” sound heard when a person inhales. Severe coughing fits can cause vomiting or changes in facial color. In between coughing fits, your child may look and feel fine.

Cough-like illnesses are common this year. If your child develops coughing fits, they should stay home from school until they have been seen by a health care provider. If you bring your child to the doctor, please show the reverse side of this letter to them. Students suspected of having pertussis should be tested (nasal swab or wash is preferred) and receive an appropriate antibiotic. Students diagnosed with pertussis may return to school after completing 5 days of antibiotics, even though they will likely continue to cough for many weeks.

If your child is coughing, tell your doctor who may want them to be tested and to receive a prescription antibiotic. Students diagnosed with pertussis must be kept home from school and should avoid crowded public places and contact with people at risk of severe disease (infants, pregnant woman, people with severe medical conditions) until completing five days of an appropriate antibiotic.

The DTaP/Tdap vaccine protects against pertussis. Pertussis can occur in people who have been vaccinated because protection can wear off, but people who have been vaccinated typically do not get as sick as unvaccinated people.

**The Health Department recommends the following:**

- Review the DTaP/Tdap vaccination records of everyone in your household and arrange for vaccination, if not up to date.
- Contact your child’s health care provider if they have a severe cough.
- If diagnosed with pertussis, your child should stay home from school until they have completed 5 days of antibiotics.
- Children with other respiratory illnesses should follow the school COVID-19 recommendations.

If you have any questions please contact <<contact information for LPHA or CDPHE epidemiologists>>

Dear Health Care Provider:

Your patient may have been exposed to pertussis. Pertussis is a severe cough illness that typically starts with cold-like symptoms then progresses into coughing fits that leave a person out of breath and may include vomiting, apnea, cyanosis, or a high-pitched “whooping” sound heard when a person inhales.

**Patients without a cough:**

Public health recommends antibiotic prophylaxis to prevent severe pertussis infections in high-risk contacts exposed to pertussis. This includes:

- Pregnant women,
- Infants less than 12 months old,
- People with an immunodeficiency,
- People who are close, household contacts to someone above.

**Recommendations for patients with a cough <21 days:**

1. Collect nasopharyngeal (NP) swabs or aspirate for pertussis PCR testing.
2. Do not delay treatment with appropriate antibiotics while waiting for laboratory results if there is no alternative diagnosis.
3. Consider antibiotic prophylaxis for all household members if a pregnant woman, an infant less than 12 months old, or anyone with a weakened immune system lives in the household.

**Recommendations for patients with a cough ≥21 days:**

1. Laboratory testing for pertussis is not necessary.
2. Antibiotics are no longer necessary after 21 days of cough, unless they are an infant <12 months of age or a pregnant woman in her third trimester. Antibiotics should be considered for these patients up through 6 weeks after their cough onset.
3. Patients are no longer infectious after 21 days of cough and can return to school or work.

The recommended antimicrobial agents for treatment or chemoprophylaxis of pertussis are

- Azithromycin (Z-Pak in those at least 6 months of age)
- Clarithromycin
- Erythromycin

Clinicians can also use Trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole. Clinicians should choose the antimicrobial after consideration of the

- Potential for adverse events and drug interactions
- Tolerability
- Ease of adherence to the regimen prescribed
- Cost

Additional guidance on antimicrobial treatment and chemoprophylaxis can be found at

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jKKAa8osN6TvyYN2bVfOXjHHaQoifCGa/view>

Should you have any questions or concerns, please call the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (303-692-2700).