

17 November 2011

TO: Staff, Parents and Caregivers of Students Houghton Bay School

PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH)

A person who attends the school has been diagnosed with confirmed Whooping Cough. The incubation period is between 6 and 20 days, average is 14 days. Whooping cough may start with a runny nose which then proceeds to coughing. If you have the disease you are infectious from the time of the runny nose until 3 weeks after the bad cough starts. If treated with a 10-14 day course of Erythromycin you are no longer infectious after you have completed 5 days of the 14 day course.

Regional Public Health has had several notifications recently of confirmed cases of Whooping Cough (Pertussis) in adults and children. The bacteria are circulating in the community, which potentially can put young babies and small children at risk of this highly infectious disease. **In children under one year of age this can be very serious. Women in the last 4 weeks of pregnancy are advised to attend their GP.**

For other families, students and staff we recommend the following actions:

- Anyone with a persistent cough should see their doctor, and remain away from school or work until the doctor is sure it is not whooping cough.
- All children should be up-to-date with their Pertussis (Whooping Cough) immunisations and are advised to check with their family doctor. Pertussis immunisation is given at six weeks, three months, five months and a booster at 4 and 11 years of age.

Whooping cough is usually characterised by a cough lasting longer than two weeks with spasms of coughing ending in vomiting or difficulty breathing. This is often accompanied by a whooping sound. However don't wait until someone has had the cough for more than two weeks before checking it out. Remember that adults can also get whooping cough but usually do not have the classical whooping and vomiting after bouts of coughing.

If you have any queries please contact your family doctor or practice nurse, or phone the Communicable Disease Team (Public Health Nurse or Medical Officer) on ☎ (04) 570 9002.

Yours sincerely

Janine Dugdale
Public Health Nurse
For Medical Officer of Health
Disease Prevention
Regional Public Health



WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS)

What Is It?

Whooping Cough is a highly infectious bacterial disease, which affects the respiratory system (breathing tubes). It is also known as the '100 day cough' because of the long course of the illness.

How Do You Recognise It?

Whooping Cough usually starts with a cold and irritating cough, but this then develops into spasms of coughing, which may end with vomiting, or with a 'whooping' sound. Complications can include pneumonia, ear infections, and symptoms related to the effects of coughing. It can be particularly serious in children under one year of age who are more at risk of serious complications including in very severe cases brain damage and death.

Can Adults Get Whooping Cough?

Yes and it is often not recognised. Adults and young people can get whooping cough as protection from vaccination or natural infection is not life long.

How Is It Spread?

Whooping Cough spreads when someone with the bacteria coughs or sneezes, spraying droplets of fluid from the nose or throat.

How Long Is It Infectious?

By the time the cough develops, the person will have been infectious for several days, and will remain infectious for up to three weeks, unless they receive antibiotic treatment.

Treatment

Antibiotic treatment shortens the contagious period. An infected person is no longer contagious from five days after the start of antibiotic treatment.

Vaccination

Regional Public Health advises all parents to ensure that their children are fully immunised against this disease. The immunisation is normally given at six weeks, three months, five months and a booster at 4 and 11 years of age. ***Immunisation is free to all children.***

Can Fully Vaccinated Children Get Pertussis/Whooping Cough

Yes, when there is a high level of infection in the community even fully vaccinated children can get whooping cough as the vaccines are effective in preventing illness in more than 80% of people.

Vaccinated children will get a milder infection and are likely to recover more quickly. To stop Pertussis circulating in the community we need a very high level of vaccination.

If you would like any more information regarding Whooping Cough, please contact the Regional Public Health Communicable Disease Team on ☎ (04) 570 9002

Websites for further information:

www.moh.govt.nz

www.imac.auckland.ac.nz