

**Central Utah Public Health Department
Piute High School
Outbreak Parent Education Letter**

Date: April 7, 2017

Dear Parent(s) and/or Guardian(s):

Your child's school has been identified as recently having two or more cases of pertussis (whooping cough), which is defined by Utah State and local health departments as a pertussis outbreak. This letter is to let you know what actions are being taken in order to help control the outbreak.

The primary goal of pertussis outbreak control efforts is to decrease the amount of disease and death among infants less than one year of age. A secondary goal is to decrease the amount of disease among persons of all ages.

Pertussis is a highly contagious bacterial infection that causes serious and long lasting coughing spells. The symptoms of pertussis usually occur in two stages. The first stage begins with cold-like symptoms, which may include a runny nose, sneezing, occasional cough and possibly a low-grade fever. This stage may last for 1-2 weeks. The cough gradually becomes more severe as the disease moves to the second stage. Symptoms of the second stage of pertussis include uncontrolled coughing spells or fits. Breathing may become so difficult that the child may make a high-pitched whooping noise, may turn blue and/or experience vomiting from coughing. The second stage can last for 1-10 weeks. Infants and small children are at high risk of developing complications resulting in hospitalization or even death from pertussis. Often adults and older children unknowingly spread pertussis to vulnerable infants.


The incubation period for pertussis (the time from when a person is exposed to the disease to the beginning of symptoms) can be anywhere from 4-21 days. If your child was exposed to students or staff with pertussis, he/she may be at risk of developing this illness during the next 4-20 days. If your child is unvaccinated, he/she may be eight times more likely to develop pertussis than children who are vaccinated. If your child does get pertussis, he/she could infect other children, infants or adults who may not have adequate protection against pertussis. Infants and small children are especially at risk of developing serious illness which may result in hospitalization or death.

The best way to prevent pertussis among infants, children, teens, and adults is to get vaccinated. Two pertussis vaccines are currently available: DTaP and Tdap. The DTaP vaccine series is for younger children. DTaP is normally given at 2, 4, and 6 months of age, with boosters at 15-18 months and again at 4-6 years of age. Tdap vaccine can be given to persons seven years of age and older, but is required prior to seventh grade entry in Utah. A Tdap booster is normally given at 11-12 years of age. It is recommended that adults or children greater than 12 years of age receive a onetime booster of Tdap if they have not received one before. Vaccination protects your child's health, your family's health, and the health of other students and their families.

The health department encourages you to watch your child for the signs or symptoms of pertussis. If your child is ill with any of the symptoms described above, please keep your child home and contact your healthcare provider as soon as possible. There is an effective antibiotic therapy for pertussis if it is diagnosed and treated in a timely fashion. Students who are showing symptoms of pertussis will be excluded from school. Students who have a personal, religious, or medical exemption against pertussis vaccination, that are known to have potentially been exposed to pertussis through close contact of ill students or staff may be excluded from school. For either reason, excluded students will not be allowed back into school until 21 days after the beginning of symptoms OR until they have received five days of appropriate antibiotic therapy. Although students may still show symptoms after treatment, they are not considered infectious after a five day course of appropriate antibiotic therapy. Please refer to the attached fact sheet for more information about pertussis, or you may visit the Utah Department of Health website at <http://health.utah.gov/epi/diseases/pertussis/index.html>.

Please contact the Health Department to discuss any questions you have regarding this outbreak. By being aware of the symptoms of pertussis, and taking the right actions if your child develops symptoms of concern, you can help in preventing spread of infection, and helping to protect infants/other high risk individuals in your community during this outbreak.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.



Central Utah Public Health Department/Piute County Nurse

Pertussis (Whooping Cough)

Fact Sheet

What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough—or pertussis—is a very serious respiratory (in the lungs and breathing tubes) infection caused by the pertussis bacteria. It is most harmful for young infants.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Pertussis starts with the following symptoms:

- Runny or stuffed-up nose
- Sneezing
- Mild cough
- A pause in breathing in infants (apnea)

After 1 to 2 weeks, severe coughing starts. Children may develop a “whooping” sound as they try to breathe and may turn blue from lack of oxygen. Coughing fits can last for up to 10 weeks.

How does whooping cough spread?

Pertussis spreads easily through the air when a person who has pertussis breathes, coughs, or sneezes. A person can spread pertussis from the very beginning of the sickness (cold-like symptoms) and for at least 2 weeks after coughing starts.

Children can catch pertussis from adults, grandparents, or older brothers or sisters who don't know they have the disease. New moms with pertussis can give it to their newborn babies.

Is it serious?

Pertussis is most dangerous for infants and young children, and can even be deadly. Infants younger than 1 year old who have pertussis may:

- Need to be hospitalized
- Develop pneumonia (a serious lung infection)
- Have seizures
- Suffer brain damage

How can I protect my child?

The best way to protect against pertussis is by getting the diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis (DTaP) vaccine. Doctors recommend that all children get the vaccine at the following ages:

- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- 15 through 18 months, and
- 4 through 6 years of age



What are the vaccine side effects?

Most children don't have any side effects from the vaccine. When side effects do occur, they are usually mild, like redness, swelling, and pain from the shot, fever, and vomiting. They happen in about 1 child out of every 4 children who get the shot. More serious side effects are rare but can include:

- A fever over 105 degrees
- Nonstop crying for 3 hours or more
- Seizures (jerking or twitching of the muscles or staring)

For more information about pertussis and the pertussis vaccine, contact your doctor, state or local health department.