



Dear Parent,

As you may know, Contra Costa County is experiencing a significant increase in the number of reported illnesses due to pertussis (whooping cough). This increase is also occurring throughout California. Sadly, to date, there have been 8 deaths in California from pertussis, all were babies.

Pertussis is a contagious illness spread by coughs and sneezes. People of all ages can get very sick from pertussis. However, adults with pertussis may have milder symptoms and unknowingly spread it to others, including children and infants. Infants under one year of age can be most likely to get very sick from pertussis. Infants can have seizures, stop breathing, and need hospitalization.

As children return to school and spend less time outdoors and more time indoors, more pertussis illness is expected.

Parents can take steps to help keep their families healthy during this pertussis epidemic:

- **Vaccinate** your children and yourself with the pertussis vaccine or booster. Protection from pertussis vaccine wears off so it is important to be up-to-date with immunizations. Contact your medical provider about vaccine. Free or low cost vaccine is available at Contra Costa Public Health immunization clinics: cchealth.org/services/immunization
- **Check** your children for symptoms of illness (please see below).
- **Keep** sick children at home. Children with a bad or unusual cough should see their medical provider.
- **Teach** you children how to cover coughs and sneezes and to frequently wash hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Contra Costa Health Services continues to monitor pertussis illness in the community and will keep school districts updated.

More information about pertussis is available online at cchealth.org/topics/pertussis

Pre-recorded information is also available by calling the Contra Costa Health Services Health Emergency Information Line at 1-888-959-9911.

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Information for Parents

What is pertussis?

Pertussis (whooping cough) is a bacterial infection of the lungs that can cause severe coughing fits. Pertussis is contagious and is spread by coughs and sneezes. Once a person is exposed to the pertussis bacteria, it can take 5 to 21 days before she/he becomes sick. Children younger than six months of age are the most vulnerable to serious illness if they develop pertussis. To date, there have been 7 deaths in California due to pertussis, all were under 3 months of age.

Is pertussis preventable?

The most effective prevention against pertussis is vaccination. We encourage vaccinations for parents, caregivers, siblings, and healthcare workers. This helps reduce the chances of a young infant being exposed to pertussis.

Children should be up-to-date with their immunizations. Children six and under should receive DTaP vaccine. Anyone over seven years of age can get the Tdap pertussis booster shot. Contact your health provider about getting pertussis vaccine for you and your family. Currently, Contra Costa Public Health immunization clinics offer free Tdap vaccine:
cchealth.org/services/immunization

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

Symptoms of pertussis can vary depending on your age and vaccination status. Adults and adolescents may have milder symptoms and unknowingly spread it to others. Symptoms can begin with cold-like symptoms (cough, runny nose, sneezing) for 1–2 weeks followed by many weeks of coughing fits. Vomiting or gagging after coughing is common. Fever is rare.

How long is a person contagious?

A person with pertussis is contagious when the cold-like symptoms begin and continues to be contagious until 24 hours after finishing antibiotic treatment, or if untreated, after three weeks of severe coughing. People with pertussis should stay home from work or school until they are no longer contagious. Even with treatment, people may continue to cough for several weeks.

Household members and others with close contact to a contagious person should receive antibiotics to prevent pertussis illness. As long as contacts do not have symptoms, they may continue to go to work or school.

How is pertussis treated?

Early treatment can reduce the chance of spreading pertussis to others. People with symptoms should see their health care provider for testing and diagnosis. Household members of a contagious person can be given antibiotics to prevent illness.

