



January 4, 2013

To: School Health Officials in Douglas County
From: Adi M. Pour, Ph.D., Health Director, Douglas County Health Department

Re: **School pertussis (whooping cough) exposure recommendations**

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Douglas County is experiencing high levels of pertussis in the community. **Because of waning immunity to pertussis, infections can occur regardless of vaccination status or history of illness.** Many children diagnosed are school-age, usually 7-11 years of age. However pertussis occurs in all ages.

Public health investigations and measures to prevent spread Health care providers and laboratories are required to report pertussis infections to the health department by state law. In addition, schools are required to report pertussis when they are notified (173 NAC 3-004.02). **Upon notification, DCHD thoroughly investigates every case and makes recommendations. When a case of pertussis occurs in a school setting, DCHD provides a letter for parents/guardians regarding their child's exposure.** These recommendations are based on established national guidelines and in consultation with a pediatric infectious disease specialist.

Exposures in groups and DCHD recommendations Transmission of pertussis commonly occurs among household members, but may also occur between children who spend ongoing time together in closed settings such as classrooms or other indoor group activities. **Children in groups or classrooms not identified by public health investigation are much less likely to develop illness and do not need to be notified unless otherwise recommended by DCHD.**

Excluded children with ongoing cough DCHD may recommend that children with **ongoing cough** in an identified group or classroom be excluded and evaluated for pertussis by a health care provider. **These recommendations only apply to children specifically identified in DCHD letters.**

Evaluation by a health care provider and testing **The health care provider will determine if a child has illness consistent with pertussis and whether the child should be tested or not. DCHD is not advising that every coughing child be tested before returning to school, nor are we routinely asking for an evaluation form from the health care provider.** Children who have been diagnosed with pertussis (even if not tested) should be treated with 5 days of appropriate antibiotic before returning to school. (See below for special situations, such as school-wide outbreaks.)

Challenges of identifying cases of pertussis In its early stages, symptoms of pertussis can mimic those of other respiratory illnesses. This means that sometimes pertussis may not be identified until a characteristic cough develops or symptoms don't go away. It is to be expected that some cases of pertussis may not be identified initially. Also, vaccinated children may have much milder symptoms because of partial immunity.

School-wide outbreaks and physician evaluation forms In certain special situations, DCHD will expand recommendations if there has been evidence of ongoing transmission in a school. DCHD may recommend expanding the notification and ongoing cough exclusion, and ask for an evaluation form from the health care provider for return to school. The purpose of this is to minimize ongoing exposures in settings where a case or cases may have been missed. In these situations, DCHD disease investigators will be working closely with school officials to ensure that these recommendations are clear.

For more information, please feel free to call the DCHD Communicable Disease Epidemiology Section at 402.444.7214 or check our web site: <http://www.douglascountyhealth.com/disease-a-immunization/pertussis>.

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