



SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH SYSTEM

May 25, 2010

Dear Staff member,

There has been an increase in the number of cases of pertussis (commonly referred to as “Whooping Cough”) in San Mateo County and throughout the U.S. this year.

Pertussis is an infection of the respiratory tract that usually lasts 6-10 weeks. Symptoms begin with a runny nose, sneezing, possibly a low-grade fever, and mild cough. After a week or two, a persistent cough develops, which may occur in explosive bursts (paroxysmal coughing), sometimes ending in a high-pitched whoop and vomiting. Older children and adults may have a less typical cough. Although the disease is less severe in adults and older children, they can unknowingly infect infants and preschoolers who are at risk for serious illness.

Pertussis can lead to serious complications, such as seizures and pneumonia, and even death. 83% of deaths from pertussis occur in infants younger than 3 months of age and household contacts have accounted for the majority of implicated transmissions to infants.

Pertussis is spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes tiny droplets into the air and another person breathes them in. An infected person is contagious at the time of the early cold-like symptoms, before persistent coughing starts. Persons remain contagious until about three weeks after the persistent cough begins (for a total contagious period of about five weeks for untreated pertussis). Those treated with antibiotics are no longer contagious after completing five days of treatment. ***San Mateo County Health System Communicable Disease Control Program recommends that students and staff ill with pertussis remain home from school during their contagious period.***

Pertussis is a vaccine-preventable disease. Children should be vaccinated against pertussis with DTaP at 2, 4, 6, and 15-18 months. Because immunity wanes five to ten years after vaccination, booster doses are recommended prior to school entry at 4-6 years of age (DTaP) and at 11-12 years of age (Tdap). Adults should also receive a one-time booster (Tdap) in place of their routine tetanus vaccination with Td. **Adults who are at increased risk for contracting and/or transmitting pertussis (for example, those in close contact with infants 6 months of age or younger, employees in school or child-care settings, and health-care providers) are particularly encouraged to receive a Tdap booster vaccination.**

As a school staff member, you play a key part in helping to minimize and control the spread of pertussis. Students and staff members with symptoms of pertussis should seek evaluation from a physician and stay home from school while ill.

As an adult in a high-risk occupation for contracting and transmitting pertussis, ask your health care provider about the adult pertussis booster (Tdap vaccine).

For more information on pertussis:

San Mateo County Health System: www.smhealth.org/pertussis

California Department of Public Health: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Pertussis.aspx>

Sincerely,

Catherine Sallenave, MD
Communicable Disease Controller
San Mateo County Health System

COMMUNITY HEALTH • PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS

Board of Supervisors: Mark Church • Rose Jacobs Gibson • Richard S. Gordon • Carole Groom • Adrienne Tissier
Health System Chief: Jean S. Fraser

225 37th Avenue • San Mateo, CA 94403 • PHONE 650.573.2346 • CA RELAY 711 • FAX 650.573.2919

www.smhealth.org