

August 2010

Dear Parent or Student Guardian,

California is experiencing the worst epidemic of pertussis (also known as whooping cough) the state has seen in the last 50 years. Whooping cough is a serious disease that that can be life threatening to infants and others with immune disease or breathing problems. It is spread from person to person though coughing. In Sonoma County whooping cough is on the rise, causing serious illness in adults and resulting in the hospitalizations of several infants and several infants in other parts of California have died.

**We need your help to help prevent the spread of whooping cough.** Over 70,000 thousand children in Sonoma County start back to school this month. We are working closely with the County of Sonoma Department of Health Services and the California Department of Public Health to monitor whooping cough and keep our families informed. We expect to see increased cases of whooping cough this fall. The best way to stop the spread of the disease is to get vaccinated. Routine childhood vaccines are available for all children from the age of 6 weeks to 7 years. Recommended booster doses for children over 7 years (who have already completed their childhood immunizations) and for adults are also available.

We are doing everything we can to keep our schools functioning as usual. **Here are a few things you can do to help:**

- **Vaccinate your children against whooping cough. Remember booster doses are needed for children over 7 years old.**
- **Vaccinate all household members, especially caregivers of infants under 6 months of age.**
- **Vaccinate all family members who are pregnant.**
- **Know the signs and symptoms of whooping cough.**
  - Cold symptoms such as runny nose
  - Coughing attacks, often ending in a “whoop” sound and sometimes causing vomiting
  - Adults may feel as if they are choking on something and feel hot and sweaty
  - Coughing frequently lasts for several weeks, and as long as three months
- **Do not send children to school if they are sick.** Any children who are determined to be sick while at school *will be sent home.*

- **Antibiotics can help.** Call your doctor or clinic if you think your child has pertussis. Keep sick children at home for at least 5 days after starting treatment for whooping cough, as this will help prevent the spread of the disease.
- **Teach your children to wash their hands** often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. You can set a good example by doing this yourself
- **Teach your children not to share personal items** like drinks, food or unwashed utensils, and to cover their coughs and sneezes with tissues. Covering up their coughs or sneezes using the elbow, arm or sleeve instead of the hand when a tissue is unavailable.

For more information, about the whooping cough, please visit the Sonoma County Public Health website at [www.sonoma-county.org](http://www.sonoma-county.org) or call the Public Health Information Line at (707) 565-4567. Information about whooping cough also available at these additional sites:

**California Department of Public Health-**

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Pertussis.aspx>

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-** <http://www.cdc.gov/features/pertussis/>

We will notify you of any additional changes to our school's strategy to prevent the spread of whooping cough.

Sincerely,

Dr Carl Wong

Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Mary Maddux-Gonzalez

Sonoma County Health Officer



**County of Sonoma  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES**

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**Correction regarding whooping cough (pertussis ) vaccination recommendations**

Earlier this month, a letter that went home to parents regarding the current whooping cough epidemic in California incorrectly said that all children over age 7 should receive a pertussis booster. The letter should have said all children age 7-9 and adults who are not already fully immunized need a booster dose and all children over age 10 and all adults who have not yet received Tdap, the whooping cough vaccine for adolescents and adults, also need booster doses.

Whooping cough is a serious disease that that can be life threatening to infants and others with immune disease or breathing problems. It is very contagious and is spread from person to person though coughing. Whooping cough is still on the rise in California and is at particularly high levels in Sonoma County, causing serious illness in adults and resulting in the hospitalizations of several infants. Several infants in other parts of California have died from whooping cough infection.

For more information, about whooping cough, please visit the Sonoma County Public Health website at [www.sonoma-county.org](http://www.sonoma-county.org) or call the Public Health Information Line at (707) 565-4477. Information about whooping cough is also available at these additional sites:

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

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-** <http://www.cdc.gov/features/pertussis/>

Please help us stop the spread of this life threatening disease and make sure everyone in your family is up to date on their whooping cough vaccines.

Thank you,

Mark Netherda, MD  
Deputy Health Officer  
County of Sonoma, Department of Health Services