

Goonellabah Public School

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Principal: Mark Spencer

7th June 2016

Dear Parent/Carer,

Pertussis (whooping cough)

A child from Goonellabah Public School has been diagnosed with pertussis (whooping cough). I am writing to provide advice and to ask that you watch out for the symptoms of pertussis in your child, especially over the next 3 weeks.

What is pertussis?

Pertussis is an infection of the throat that can cause bouts of coughing, and sometimes breathing difficulties and vomiting. It can be a very serious infection in small children. The illness can last for many weeks. It usually starts with a snuffle or a cold.

What should people sick with pertussis do?

If your child develops symptoms, please take your child and this letter to your local doctor as soon as possible. Your doctor can advise whether pertussis is likely and arrange for early treatment if needed. Treating people who have pertussis with antibiotics can stop the infection spreading, but is more effective if started early.

To help prevent this infection spreading, people who have been diagnosed with pertussis should not attend school until they have completed the first 5 days of a course of the recommended antibiotics. If antibiotics cannot be taken, then they must stay away for 3 weeks after onset of the cough.

How is it prevented?

Vaccination is the most important way of reducing pertussis in our community. It is important to double check that your child is fully up to date with his or her immunisations against pertussis. If in doubt, please ask your doctor to check.

It is recommended by the Public Health Unit that children who are not fully vaccinated against pertussis in the school take special antibiotics to help prevent infection.

Need more information?

For more information, please see the fact sheet on the back of this page, or call the Public Health Unit on 6620 7500.

Yours sincerely

Mark Spencer



Education &
Communities

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Whooping Cough

Living Well factsheet – Work Health and Safety Directorate

Whooping cough affects people of all ages, but can be very serious in babies.

What is whooping cough?

Whooping cough (or pertussis) is a disease caused by infection of the throat with the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.

Signs and symptoms

Whooping cough usually begins like a cold, with a runny nose, tiredness and sometimes mild fever. Coughing then develops, in bouts, followed by a deep gasp or "whoop". Some people vomit after coughing. It can be very serious in small children who may go blue or stop breathing during coughing attacks and may need to go to hospital. In older children and adults it may be less serious, with bouts of coughing that continue for many weeks.

How is it spread?

It is spread by droplets from coughing or sneezing. If untreated, an infected person can spread it to other people for up to 3 weeks after the onset of a cough. The time between exposure and getting sick is usually 7-10 days, but can be up to 3 weeks.

What is the risk of transmission?

Anyone can get whooping cough. People living in the same household as an infected person are more likely to catch it. Immunisation greatly reduces the risk of infection, but re-infection can occur.

What treatment is available?

A specific antibiotic is taken for 7 days. This can prevent the spread of the germ to others. However, coughing often continues for many weeks despite treatment. Get treated early. While infectious, avoid other people and stay away from young children e.g. at child care centres, pre-school and school.

What precautions can you take?

Ensure mouths and noses are covered with a mask when in contact with an infected person. Wear gloves when in contact with an infected person and when disposing of used tissues.

How can you prevent contracting whooping cough?

Immunise your child on time:
Immunisation is available through your GP. The vaccine does not give lifelong protection. Children need to be immunised at 2, 4 and 6 months. Boosters are needed at 4 years of age and again at 15 years of age.

Keep your baby away from people who cough: Babies need 2 or 3 vaccinations before they are protected therefore it is very important to keep people with coughing illnesses away from your baby so they don't pass on whooping cough or other germs.

Get immunised if you are an adult in close contact with small children: It is recommended that when planning a pregnancy, or as soon as a baby is born that both parents get immunised. It is also recommended that adults working with young children get immunised.

If you are a close contact of someone with whooping cough, watch out for the symptoms. If symptoms develop, see your GP: Some close contacts at high risk e.g. children under 1 year, children not fully vaccinated; women at the end of their pregnancy, and others who live or work with high-risk people may need to take antibiotics to prevent infection.

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Further Information

Contact your general practitioner,
local public health unit or
community health centre

NSW Department of Health

See Infection Control

Information in this fact sheet has been sourced from the NSW Department of Health.