

## Health Alerts

### Sample Letter for Pertussis Contacts

Dear Parent/Guardian:

We have had [# of cases] of [confirmed, suspected] pertussis reported in our school. If your child has been around someone with pertussis, they may become sick with pertussis as well. This is especially true when the child has not received all the pertussis vaccine shots. Sometimes even if a child's shots are up to date, they may still be able to get pertussis.

Pertussis is a highly contagious disease that is spread through the air by cough. Pertussis begins with cold symptoms and a cough which becomes much worse over 1-2 weeks. Symptoms usually include a long series of coughs ("coughing fits") followed by a whooping noise. However, older children, adults and very young infants may not develop the whoop. There is generally only a slight fever. People with pertussis may have a series of coughs followed by vomiting, turning blue, or difficulty catching breath. The cough is often worse at night and cough medicines usually do not help alleviate the cough.

If your child has been in contact with someone with pertussis antibiotics may prevent them from becoming ill. If your child is already sick, giving antibiotics early can help your child get well faster and lower the chances of spreading the disease to others.

Please consider the following New York State Department of Health recommendations:

1. Infants under one year old, especially those under six months, are most likely to have severe symptoms if they develop pertussis. When possible, young infants should be kept away from people with a cough. Infants with any coughing illness should be seen promptly by their doctor.
2. Pertussis vaccine is routinely given to children under 7 years old, but immunity can fade over time, and periodic "booster" doses are needed by adolescents and adults to keep immunity strong. Children should get 5 doses before the age of 7 years. If you have children less than 7 years of age who have not been completely immunized against pertussis (particularly infants under one year) we recommend you talk to your child's doctor about the benefits of vaccination. Adolescents 11 through 18 years of age should get one booster dose of pertussis. Adults 19 through 64 years of age are encouraged to talk to their doctor about pertussis vaccination.
3. If your child comes down with cold symptoms that include a cough, talk to your child's doctor without delay. Tell the doctor that pertussis has been seen in your child's schoolmates.

If you have further concerns or questions you may contact your doctor or the Erie County Department of Health at 858-7697.