

EDUCATION CENTER

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February 22, 2017

Dear Freedom Parent/Guardian:

Your child may have been exposed to a case of pertussis (whooping cough). Pertussis is a highly contagious disease that is spread through the air when an infected person sneezes or coughs. 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, coughing may be absent in children, adolescents, and adults who were previously vaccinated. There is generally no fever. People with pertussis may have a series of coughs followed by vomiting, turning blue, or difficulty catching their breath. The cough is often worse at night and cough medicines usually do not help alleviate the cough. The disease can be very severe and, although deaths are rare, they do occur, especially in infants less than one year of age.

Sometimes a child can get sick with pertussis after being around someone with the illness. This is especially true when the child has not received all of his/her pertussis vaccinations.

If your child has a high chance of getting sick, the doctor can give antibiotics to lower that chance. 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.

The Pennsylvania Department of Health strongly recommends the following:

1. Infants under one year, and particularly under six months, are most likely to experience severe illness if they develop pertussis. When possible, young infants should be kept away from people with a cough. **Infants with any coughing illness should be promptly evaluated by their doctor.**
2. Making sure that children receive all their shots on time is the best way to control pertussis. Children should receive four (4) doses of DTaP vaccine by 18 months of age and an additional dose of DTaP before they start school. If you have children who have not been completely immunized against pertussis (particularly infants under one year) we recommend that you promptly contact your child’s doctor to discuss getting your child vaccinated. Pertussis vaccine is not given to children 7-9 years of age.

3. A combination tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis vaccine (Tdap) is available for use in adolescents and adults. Tdap is recommended for use in all children and adults 10 years and older. If it is more than 2 years since your child received his/her last Td booster, he/she may receive the new Tdap vaccine to boost their pertussis immunization.
4. If your child comes down with cold symptoms that include a cough, he/she should not attend daycare/school until evaluated by his/her physician. Children with pertussis, if their medical condition allows, may return to daycare/school five (5) days after starting the antibiotics and must continue taking the antibiotics until completed.
5. If your child is diagnosed with pertussis, all household members and other close contacts should also be treated with antibiotics regardless of their age or vaccination status.

If your child needs the Tdap vaccine, please contact your child's doctor. If your child does not have a doctor and needs the Tdap vaccine, you can make an appointment at the Bethlehem Health Bureau. For any questions or to receive the vaccine you may call the Bethlehem Health Bureau at 610-865-7083 or the Department of Health at 1-877-PA-HEALTH.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Vivian Robledo-Shorey
Director of Student Services &
Minority Affairs

VRS:acv

cc: City of Bethlehem Bureau of Health