

December 16, 2019



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Dear Parent or Guardian,

A higher than normal number of cases of pertussis (whooping cough) have been reported in Spokane County residents. One to four cases are typically reported each month; however, 51 cases have been reported since November, two-thirds of which are in school-aged children across most school districts in the county. An additional 14 suspect cases are under investigation. Because pertussis is often mistaken for other respiratory illnesses in older children and adults, we want to provide you with information on this illness.

Pertussis is a contagious illness that begins with mild symptoms similar to the common cold, such as a runny nose and cough. The cough typically worsens over the next 2-3 weeks and tends to occur in spasms, or fits, that may be followed by a "whooping" sound. Coughing fits are sometimes followed by vomiting and are usually worse at night. Some people with pertussis, particularly older children and adults, may have mild symptoms and not realize they are sick or contagious.

In infants and young children, a cough may not be present and instead they may have trouble breathing and may gag, gasp, turn blue, or vomit. Pertussis can cause severe illness requiring hospitalization in infants and children under the age of one.

Pertussis is spread when ill people cough and sneeze near others, especially in close spaces over prolonged periods of time, such as within the same household. Symptoms usually appear within 7-10 days of exposure, but can be as long as three weeks. If your child develops a cough that occurs in fits and has a prolonged low-grade fever, or has other symptoms of respiratory distress, s/he should be evaluated by a healthcare provider. Take this letter with you when you visit your provider.

The best means of protecting children against pertussis is to keep their immunizations up-to-date. Immunity against pertussis decreases as children previously immunized get older. Please check with your healthcare provider to make sure your child's immunizations are current.

Pertussis is treated with antibiotics. If treated, a person with pertussis can return to normal activities, such as school, work or sports, five days after treatment is begun. Although they may continue to cough for many weeks, they are no longer contagious. Without antibiotics, someone with pertussis is contagious for several weeks after coughing begins. It is important that ill students stay home while contagious.

If you have further questions, consult your healthcare provider or contact Epidemiology at the Spokane Regional Health District at (509) 324-1442.

Sincerely,

Spokane Regional Health District Epidemiology