

July 11, 2019

PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH) EXPOSURE AT GIBSONS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A confirmed case of **pertussis** has been identified at Gibsons Elementary School. Students, staff, and visitors who attended the school in mid- to late- June may have been exposed.

- Pertussis is a contagious disease of the lungs and throat caused by bacteria in the mouth, nose, and throat of an infected person. It is spread when the sick person coughs or sneezes.
- If you become infected, it usually takes about 7-10 days to get symptoms, but it may take as long as 21 days.
- Early symptoms are like having a cold (sneezing, runny nose, low fever, mild cough).
- 1-2 weeks later, symptoms may include long spells of coughing that often end with a whoop or crowing sound when you breathe in. The coughing may be so bad that the person gags or vomits. This cough can last up to two months and happens more at night.
- Pertussis can be very serious and life threatening for infants under 1 year old.

If you have early symptoms of pertussis, see your health care provider to get tested and treated. Early treatment can reduce the duration of the cough, which can last many weeks. Also, the earlier you are treated with antibiotics, the less likely you are to spread the disease to other people. Take this letter with you to show your health care provider.

We recommend preventative antibiotics for some people who have been exposed to pertussis and have a very high risk of complications, even if they do not have symptoms yet. These are babies less than one year of age and pregnant women in the last three months of pregnancy. We do not recommend antibiotics for other exposed people who are well. **Please contact public health at the number listed below if you are in the last three months of pregnancy and/or you have a child under the age of one year who visited the school during this time period.**

Now is a good time to make sure your vaccines are up to date. Children normally have pertussis-containing vaccinations at 2, 4, 6 and 18 months old, at 4 – 6 years old and in grade 9. As an adult you can boost your immunity by getting the Tdap vaccine, but it is not free. Getting vaccinated now will not protect you from this exposure but will give protection from future cases in your community. For information about pertussis-containing vaccines please visit www.immunizebc.ca.

Have questions? Please call the Communicable Disease Control Nurse at **604-675-3900**, toll free at **1-855-675-3900**.

Yours sincerely,



John Harding, MB BCh BAO, MPH, CCFP, FRCPC
Medical Health Officer
Vancouver Coastal Health Authority

Reference # 261