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*From the Office of the Medical Health Officer*

February 24, 2010

**To: Chatelech Parents**

**Re: Whooping Cough on the Sunshine Coast**

The Sunshine Coast has had recent confirmed cases of pertussis at your school. Pertussis is a contagious bacterial disease of the lungs and throat that is spread by an infected person coughing or sneezing. It can be treated with antibiotics, but is best controlled through vaccinations that are part of regular childhood immunizations.

Pertussis starts like a common cold, with sneezing, runny nose, low-grade fever and a mild cough. Over the next week or two the cough gets worse, leading to severe coughing spells that often end with a whoop (which is where the name whooping cough comes from). The cough can make a person gag or spit out mucous, and make it hard to take a breath. The cough can last up to a month or two, and is worse at night. Babies less than six months old, teenagers and adults often do not make the whooping sound. If left untreated, pertussis can lead to more serious health complications.

People who have had face-to-face exposure for 5 minutes or more, or shared confined air space with a person who has pertussis for an hour or more, are at increased risk of developing pertussis. Infection in pregnant women and infants can lead to severe disease. If exposed people become infected, it takes about 7 to 10 days for them to develop symptoms of whooping cough.

Public Health will identify and contact the following groups of people who have been exposed to a person with pertussis and recommend they visit their doctor for preventative antibiotics:

- Parents of infants and women in the 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester of pregnancy
- Persons who live with or attend the same family/group daycare as infants and women in their 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester.

Other persons who have been exposed will be asked to consult their doctor if they develop illness consistent with pertussis. A person who has pertussis and does not get it treated can spread the germs to others for up to 3 weeks after the coughing spells start. Early diagnosis will get you on antibiotics right away, and will help prevent you from spreading whooping cough.



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